

Adult
BIBLE STUDY



now.

**TO THE
HARVEST**



THE ALLIANCE

AS PART OF THIS YEAR'S MISSIONS ENGAGEMENT THEME, WE WANTED TO TAKE AN OPPORTUNITY TO PAUSE AS A DENOMINATIONAL FAMILY AND EXAMINE JESUS' PARABLE FOUND IN *Mark 4:26-29*.

Through this Bible study, we will explore the implications of Jesus' story for missions and our lives. And as we dig into what the Kingdom of God is like through principles of sowing and reaping, trusting that God is at work, and looking toward His return, we hope the study and the ensuing contemplation and discussion enrich your soul. May it bless you on the Way.



WEEK 1

This is what the Kingdom of God is like— a man scatters seed generously in a field.



WEEK 2

As time passes, God works underground to make the seed sprout and grow.



WEEK 3

When lives are transformed by Christ, the harvest comes bearing fruit, with enough seeds to plant the next field.



WEEK 4

God's people sow, pray over, and harvest empty, neglected fields and then move on to others, and others—until there are no more empty fields. Until all the world hears and our King returns.



🎵 Listen to “Seasons” by Benjamin William Hastings.



Sow Abundantly

READ

“He also said, **This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground.** Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

—Mark 4:26-29

DISCUSS



WHAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS LIKE

Jesus is recorded as speaking about the Kingdom over 100 times in more than 80 places in the Gospels. Because of this, it seems that in order for us to understand Jesus' ministry, heart, and message, we must understand what He means by "Kingdom" and how it relates to us, His people.

- ❓ As you read through this parable, what does it reveal to you about the nature of the Kingdom?

SCATTERING SEED

"Broadcast seeding" is the method of sowing a field by scattering a large number of seeds over the soil, either by hand or machine. While it is not a precise method of planting, it is quick and simple.

In the parable of the sower, which Jesus shares at the beginning of Mark 4, the seed planted by the sower represents God's Word.

- ❓ How does this inform your understanding of this parable of the growing seed?

THE LAW OF RETURNS

"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously" (2 Cor. 9:6).

With the measure that we sow and invest, we will reap the same. If we sow small amounts or not at all, we will reap little or nothing. However, if we sow generously or abundantly, we will also reap the same. This principle can be found in several places throughout Scripture and in Jesus' teaching.

- ❓ How does this passage inform your understanding of playing our part in God's mission out of obedience and faith?

Read through Mark 4:26–29 again. Sit in silence and prayer with the passage for a minute or two. Then think through or discuss the following questions:

- ❓ What encourages you about this passage? What is hard?
- ❓ How does this parable, and specifically verse 26, impact your understanding of missions?
- ❓ What other passages in Scripture is the Holy Spirit reminding you of?

🎵 Listen to **"Harvest"** by The Cashmans.



Pray Expectantly

READ

"He also said, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. **Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.** As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.'"

—Mark 4:26-29

DISCUSS



GOD IS AT WORK UNDERGROUND

"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but **God has been making it grow**. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (1 Cor. 3:6-7).

There is an assuredness that comes when working with God. When we do our part, we can be assured that He will do His. God is always at work, but sometimes it is underground in the unseen places. We aren't always aware of what He's doing, but He is always at work. After doing our part in faithfulness—planting seeds—we must live in faith that God will do what only He can do.

- ? In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul sows the seed and Apollos waters it. What has the Holy Spirit revealed to you as your part to play in God's mission?

FAITHFUL IN PRAYER

While we wait on God's work, we are never idle. Scripture exhorts us to be faithful in prayer (see Rom. 12:12) in every situation and circumstance (see Phil. 4:6). Jesus also teaches us to pray that His Kingdom would come to Earth as it is in heaven (see Matt. 6:10).

- ? What part does prayer have to play in the Great Commission?

AUTOMATIC DIRT

In the original language, "All by itself" is one word that modifies "soil." The root word is *automatos* (αὐτόματος), which means *without intervention from another; moved by one's own impulse; automatic*. Without the intervention of the sower—such as weeding, watering, or even worrying—the automatic dirt produces fruit. However, even in this story, the "automatic" processes of nature have been set in motion by the Creator. What we see as automatic still shows the work of His hands. The automatic nature of the process instead may reveal further the assuredness that God will do His part.

GROWTH IN STAGES

The fruit of this parable's harvest doesn't burst out of the ground fully formed. Instead, it grows gradually in stages. How have you seen this be the case when God is making something grow?

Read through Mark 4:26-29 again. Sit in silence and prayer with the passage for a minute or two. Then think through or discuss the following questions:

- ? What encourages you about this passage? What is hard?
- ? How does this parable, specifically verses 27-28, impact your understanding of missions?
- ? What other passages in Scripture is the Holy Spirit reminding you of?

🎵 Listen to “**Lord of the Harvest**” by Lindy Cofer.



Harvest Faithfully

READ

“He also said, ‘This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. **As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.**”

—**Mark 4:26-29**

DISCUSS



NECESSARY YIELDING

In Western cultures, the sickle is often associated with death instead of harvest. In this passage, the sickle is used to bring in the harvest. But death is also present. The word in Greek for “ripe” here is *paradidomi* (παράδιδωμι), which means *to give into the hands of another*. This is the same word often used regarding Jesus giving Himself up to be crucified. And in John 12:24, Jesus says, “Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” Throughout the Bible, we often see that death precedes new life.

- ❓ How does this reality of what it means to be “ripe” affect your understanding of the parable and of God’s mission?

A TRANSFORMED, MULTIPLYING CHURCH

Once fruit is ripe, it needs to be harvested. And it isn’t harvested just to sit in a storehouse or to be eaten. Instead, as Scripture says, it “yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater” (see Isa. 55:10). In order to create a sustainable cycle, seed must be set aside to plant in other fields. What a great picture of multiplication!

In 2 Corinthians 9:10, Paul writes, “Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.”

- ❓ How does trust in God’s faithfulness to be at work affect our participation in God’s mission?

SOW, PRAY, HARVEST, REPEAT

The cycle of sowing, prayerfully waiting, and harvesting must repeat and multiply. In Acts 1:8, Jesus tells His disciples that they will be His witnesses in their own neighborhood (Jerusalem), their region or country (Judea), the place nearby that is culturally different from them (Samaria), and everywhere in between, to the farthest corners of the world. That means gospel access for all people. It means sowing in more fields, and more, until there are no more overlooked, neglected fields. Until every people group has heard the good news of Jesus Christ. As you think about this Great Commission work, how do you feel? Are you encouraged? Discouraged? What do you feel God speaking to you right now?

Read through Mark 4:26–29 again. Sit in silence and prayer with the passage for a minute or two. Then think through or discuss the following questions:

- ❓ What encourages you about this passage? What is hard?
- ❓ How does this parable, and specifically verses 29, impact your understanding of missions?
- ❓ What other passages in Scripture is the Holy Spirit reminding you of?

🎵 Listen to **"The Sower's Song"** by Andrew Peterson.



Until the King Returns

READ

"And **this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world** as a testimony to all nations, and **then the end will come.**"

—**Matthew 24:14**

DISCUSS



NOT RETURNING VOID

“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, **so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it**” (Isa. 55:10-11).

God’s words and promises are like the natural water cycle and the seasons of new growth that come after winter. They are inevitable, already in motion, and always fruitful. The work of missions can be discouraging. Waiting on God and His promises can be painful, disheartening, and slow. But take heart. God’s purposes and promises will come to pass.

- 🔍 Have you experienced an answered promise from God?
- 🔍 Are there promises you are still waiting for Him to fulfill?

UNTIL THERE ARE NO MORE EMPTY FIELDS

We can glean at least two things from looking at Matthew 24:14 alongside the parable in Mark 4:26-29, as well as other foundational Great Commission passages. First, the work of the Great Commission isn’t endless. At a certain point, every people group will have had a chance to hear the good news, the gospel of the Kingdom; one day, *All of Jesus for All the World* won’t be just the Alliance vision but a reality. Second, our missions work isn’t purposeless. In The Alliance, “Coming King” is part of the Fourfold Gospel because we long to see Jesus’ return. Much of our zeal for missions is because of this longing—not in a manipulative way, but out of obedience and love for our King.

Out of obedience to Jesus’ Commission and longing for His return, we will keep sowing, praying over, and harvesting in more fields, and even more fields—until there are no more empty, unplowed fields. Until the end comes and our King returns in glory. As you look at Matthew 24:14 alongside our main parable, what stands out to you?

Read through Mark 4:26-29 again, and then read Matthew 24:14. Sit in silence and prayer with the passage for a minute or two. Then think through or discuss the following questions:

- 🔍 What encourages you about these passages? What is hard?
- 🔍 How does Matthew 24:14 impact your understanding of missions?
- 🔍 What other passages in Scripture is the Holy Spirit reminding you of?



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