



The Sower

Matthew 13:3-11, 18-23

Level C

Ages 11-14

Lesson Focus: Listening to the Lord

Reading Summary: Jesus spoke to a large crowd from a boat on the Sea of Galilee. He told the parable of the sower. As the sower sowed, some seed fell on the road, some fell on stony places, some fell among thorns, and some fell on good ground. The seed was the Word of God. The different kinds of ground on which it fell are different ways in which people receive the Word. Hearing the Word and trying to do what it says leads to a life of fruitfulness.

Lesson 1		Materials Supplied	Materials Needed
1. Welcome Warm-up Activity (2-3 minutes)	Listen	Sound ID directions p. 2 video online at bitly.com/SoundID	device for listening to video
2. Focus on the Word Use all activities (5-7 minutes)	Read the Word and Talk About It	see <i>Reading Summary</i> above discussion guide p. 2	Bible or copy of Matthew 13:3-11,18-23
3. Learn by Doing Choose 1-2 activities (15-20 minutes)	Take Action students take turns role-playing and observing different kinds of listening as a way to explore the inner meaning of the parable of the sower	How Are You Listening? directions p. 3 <i>Listening Stories</i> p. 5 <i>Listening Cards</i> p. 6	space to act, 1 piece of stiff paper for printing
	Explore students consider the parable of the Sower in the context of attitudes toward daily activities	Cultivating Good Ground directions pp. 3-4 <i>Cultivating Good Ground Charts</i> p. 7	pencils or pens
4. Wrap It Up (2-3 minutes)	Take the Message Home introduce the <i>Take Home Cards</i>	Having Ears and a Voice p. 8	

1. Welcome Warm-up Activity

Sound ID

Supplies needed: device for listening to a video online such as mobile phone, tablet, or computer

Our story today is about *hearing* the Word of God. How well do you listen? We're going to listen to a series of sounds. As you listen, try to keep track of the *number of sounds* and *what they are*. The order of the sounds is not important.

Play *Sound ID* at bitly.com/SoundID. Stop when you feel the students have heard enough.

1. How many sounds did you hear?
2. What were they?
3. Why is it difficult to listen to *everything* someone says?
4. Talk about a time when you were very engaged in listening to something or someone. What kept your attention? An entertaining speaker? A subject you were really interested in?

Answers: 19 sounds; (1) alarm clock (2) cheering (3) dog barking (4) barn door closing (5) bowling strike (6) bubbles (7) applause (8) coin dropping (9) cow mooing (10) footsteps (11) rain (12) jet flying over (13) children cheering (14) Morse code (15) ocean waves (16) school bell (17) seagulls (18) squeaky toy (19) child giggling

2. Focus on the Word

Read: Matthew 13:3-11, 18-23

What part does listening play in getting to know another person? Various answers.

What part does listening to the Word play in getting to know the Lord? The Lord speaks to us in the Word. When we really pay attention to the Word we can get to know the Lord—just as we get to know our friends by listening to them.

When the Lord was on earth He taught spiritual truths through parables—simple stories with hidden meanings. Only a few who heard them were ready to understand their deeper messages.

The parable of the sower describes how heavenly life grows inside us from the ideas we hear from the Word. The seeds that are planted are like living truth from the Lord's Word.

The places seeds fall in the parable show different ways we hear and respond to the Word. Why might our responses to the Word be different at different times?

When our minds are like the wayside, the words we hear stay in our memory but do not affect the way we *act*. This is like a seed lying on hard ground, or like ideas that flit through our minds but are quickly swallowed up by other ideas— like birds that eat the seeds before they sprout.

True ideas that fall into “shallow rocky soil” burn up in the hot sun because they do not have deep roots. In the Word the sun most often represents the Lord. In this case, it is used negatively and represents loving ourselves. It is like evil spirits who pressure us to put selfish desires above service to the Lord and others. If we do not have strong roots of connection to the Lord's truth, it is easier to give in to selfish impulses when “the heat is on.”

The seeds which fell among thorns are like true ideas a person believes, but later become lost or crowded out because other concerns become more important—such as being successful or having money. What might this look like in a person's life? A person might start out doing homework honestly, but then discover it's faster and results in better grades if answers are copied from someone else, or from the internet. Over time, his motivation starts to change and he wants good grades regardless of what it takes to get them.

What character traits can help us not only hear the Word but actually *listen* to it, so we can cultivate friendships with other people and with the Lord? Various answers.

3. Learn by Doing

Choose one or two activities

Choice How Are You Listening?

Students role-play and observe different kinds of listening as a way to deepen their understanding of the parable of the sower.



1. The parable of the sower is about different ways of receiving truth from the Word. The four kinds of ground depict ways of listening and responding to the Lord's messages.
2. Hand each student a copy of the *Listening Cards* (p. 6) printed on regular paper and a pen or pencil. Together, read through the different types of listening described there.
3. Explain that students will take turns acting out the different kinds of listening. The rest of the group will guess what kind of listening the person is acting out. When it is your turn to act, remember to think about eye movements, facial expressions, body language and any words or vocalizations, like "uh huh", etc.
4. Ask for two volunteers. One is the reader, and the other is the listener.
5. Give the reader a copy of *Listening Stories* (p. 5) to look over. Place the *Listening Cards* you printed and cut apart face down on the table. Have the listener choose one card without revealing what it says.
6. Allow the listener 30 seconds to think about how to act out the kind of listening they selected while the reader looks over one of the fables.
7. The reader and listener sit or stand at the front of the room for the demonstration, including giving the listener a few seconds to respond once the fable is finished.
8. Ask the other students to guess what kind of listening was demonstrated. What clues (body language, etc.) led them to that decision? Did people get the answer the actor was going for?
9. Choose other readers and listeners and run steps 4-6 again as many times as desired. (It's fine to repeat fables as needed.)
10. In what ways did this activity help you understand how you listen to other people or to the Word?

Materials Needed

Open space for acting, one copy of *Listening Stories* p. 5 and *Listening Cards* p. 6 printed on stiff paper, *Listening Cards* printed on regular paper (1 per student)

Prepare in Advance

Print a copy of *Listening Cards* p. 6 on stiff paper and cut apart the four cards. Print other pages as needed.

New Church Concept Kinds of Ground

A "field" means the good of life in which are to be implanted the things of faith, that is, spiritual truths which are of the church. This is evident from the Lord's parable of the sower. That the "seed" is the Word of the Lord, or truth, which is said to be of faith, and that the "good ground" is the good which is of charity, is evident, for it is the good in a person that receives the Word. The "hard way" is falsity. A "stony place" is truth that has no root in good. "Thorns" are evils. See *Arcana Coelestia* 3310

Choice Cultivating Good Ground

In this activity, students explore the message of the parable of the sower in terms of routine tasks by considering what it might be like to have attitudes like the different kinds of ground—and the actions and results that follow.

1. Like natural seeds in the ground, seeds of truth from the Word have the potential to sprout, blossom and bear fruit in people's lives. But each

Materials Needed for Each Student

Copy of *Cultivating Good Ground Charts* p. 7, pen or pencil

Cultivating Good Ground *continued*

individual must be willing to receive and nurture the truth in “good ground.”



2. Attitudes are a lot of what makes for “good ground”. Let’s see how this might work out in an example of a daily activity.
3. Hand out *Cultivating Good Ground Charts* (p. 7) and read through the sample activity of cleaning up a storage area together.
4. Working alone, or in pairs, have students choose a new activity and fill out the blank chart. (If needed, remind students what the different types of ground mean from the discussion on p. 2.) Possible activities include going to a party, doing homework, a family vacation, sports training, practicing a musical instrument, etc.
5. Once the charts are filled out, get everyone together for discussion.
 - What did doing this exercise tell you about how much the results depend on your attitude?
 - What difficulties come up when you try to change your attitude toward something?
 - Even though it is difficult to change how you feel, you can control your actions. Can changing your actions change your attitude?
6. The Lord works with us in this way to help the kingdom of heaven grow within us. He asks us to work on changing what’s outside—what we do—so that He can work on changing what’s inside—our feelings—at the same time.
7. If you cultivate good ground by really listening and paying attention to the Word, the Lord will help good loves grow inside you. When you partner with the Lord, He can make your life yield good fruit.

New Church Concept Good Made Fruitful

Goodness continually flows in from the Lord. But when it comes through the inner or spiritual person to the outer or natural person, it is there either perverted, turned back, or suffocated. But when the things which belong to the love of self and love of the world are removed from the outer person, then goodness is received there and is made fruitful. See *Arcana Coelestia* 3147.2

New Church Concept Removing Evils

People ought to remove evils from their externals as if of themselves. Unless people do this, the Lord cannot remove the evils that are in their internals. See *Divine Providence* 102

4. Wrap It Up

Take the Message Home

Choose one or two questions to help bring the message home.

- What image does the phrase, “Behold, a sower went out to sow” bring up for you?
- What part do our *attitudes* have in affecting the choices we make to change our *actions*?
- What can we do in order to get the Lord’s help in changing our attitudes?
- How could you take the message of the sower into your relationships with others?
- How could you take the message of the sower into your relationship with the Lord?

Give out *Take Home Cards* (two per page, p. 8) on “Having Ears and a Voice” to the students as they leave and suggest they put them up where they will see them this week.

The Wolf and His Shadow

A wolf left his lair one evening in fine spirits and an excellent appetite. As he ran, the setting sun cast his shadow far out on the ground, and it looked as if the wolf were a hundred times bigger than he really was.

“Why,” exclaimed the Wolf proudly, “see how big I am! Fancy *me* running away from a puny lion! I’ll show him who is fit to be king of the beasts, he or I.”

Just then an immense shadow blotted him out entirely, and the next instant a lion struck him down with a single blow.

Do not let your fancy make you forget reality.

Adapted from Aesop’s Fables

Belling the Cat

The mice once called a meeting to decide on a plan to free themselves of their enemy, the cat. At the very least they wished to find some way of knowing when she was coming, so they would have time to run away. Something had to be done, for they lived in constant fear of her claws and hardly dared leave their dens by night or day.

Many plans were discussed, but none of them was thought good enough. At last a young mouse got up and said, “All we have to do is to hang a bell around the cat’s neck. When we hear the bell ringing we will know that our enemy is coming.”

All the mice were surprised that no one had thought of such a simple plan before. They were sure it would succeed. But in the middle of their rejoicing, an old mouse got up and said, “I will say that the plan of the young mouse is very good. But let me ask one question: who will bell the cat?”

It is one thing to say that something should be done, but quite a different matter to do it.

Adapted from Aesop’s Fables

The Crow and the Pitcher

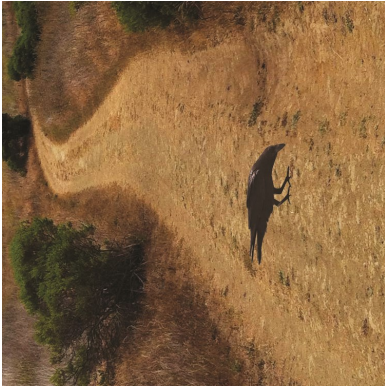
In a spell of dry weather, when the birds could find very little to drink, a thirsty crow found a pitcher with a little water in it.

But the pitcher was tall and had a narrow neck. No matter how hard he tried, the crow could not reach the water. The poor thing felt as if he would die of thirst.

Then an idea came to him. Picking up some small pebbles, he dropped them into the pitcher one by one. With each pebble the water rose a little higher until at last it was close enough to the top of the pitcher that the crow could drink.

In a pinch a good use of our wits may help us out.

Adapted from Aesop’s Fables



Not Listening

Wayside Listening

The listener does not pay attention to the speaker.

The listener hears but does not take anything in.

The listener is thinking about other things—perhaps day dreaming, looking at a phone, etc.



Fake Listening

Stony Ground Listening

The listener acts as if he/she is listening but is not.

The listener wants to do something else.

The listener cares about what they want to do, but not about the speaker.



Partial Listening

Thorny Ground Listening

The listener is paying careful attention, but with the goal of eventually winning an argument or making the speaker look foolish.

The listener doesn't really care about the speaker or the story.



Active Listening

Good Ground Listening

The listener is interested in what the speaker is saying.

The listener wants to understand what they are hearing.

The listener thinks about the story and reacts or responds to it.

Activity: Your dad asks you to clean up a storage area so your family can use it as a game room. Right now it is full of tools, paint cans, old toys, etc.
Your dad explains what he wants you to do with all the stuff.

	Attitude	Actions	Results
Wayside or Road <i>seeds eaten by birds</i>	You listen to your dad at first, but soon start thinking about what you want to do with your friends later.	You can't do much, because you don't know where to put different things since you weren't listening.	The space is still a mess. Your dad is disappointed with the job you did.
Stony Ground <i>plants wither in sun</i>	You listen to the instructions, but feel annoyed that you are being asked to help.	You start working but it's tiring. You get mad and tell your dad you won't finish unless he pays you.	The space is only partly clean because you argued about the job instead of doing it.
Thorny Ground <i>plants choked</i>	You want your dad to think you are helpful so you can win an argument about going out later.	You work hard at first, but get bored and start shoving all the stuff around randomly so you can finish fast.	The space looks cleaner, but no one can find what they need. Your dad is upset because his tools got thrown out along with the old paint.
Good Ground <i>plants produce fruit</i>	You want to help and realize that a game room will be fun for the family. You listen carefully.	You do the job carefully and thoroughly, paying attention to what you are doing.	The space is clean. Your dad is happy and you can soon enjoy the game room. You feel good about helping out.

Activity:

	Attitude	Actions	Results
Wayside or Road <i>seeds eaten by birds</i>			
Stony Ground <i>plants wither in sun</i>			
Thorny Ground <i>plants choked</i>			
Good Ground <i>plants produce fruit</i>			



Having Ears and a Voice

Read: “Give ear, O Lord to my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications. In the day of my trouble I will call upon You, for You will answer me.” Psalm 86:6-7

Reflect: In the parable of the Sower, Jesus says, “They who have ears to hear, let them hear!” He also says the good ground is like people who hear the word and understand it. We know we are supposed to listen to the Lord talking to us in His Word—to use our ears. But what about using our voices to talk to the Lord as well?

Prayer is one way of talking to the Lord. We may ask for help or tell the Lord that we are grateful for all He does. Sometimes, we sense an answer in a feeling we get, or a verse we read, or unexpected help we are given. Other times, it seems as if there is no answer. But even then the Lord is listening to us. He has an ear for our prayers, and He listens to our voice. If we can’t hear His response, perhaps we need to keep asking, keep considering what we might do, and keep listening with patience.

Respond: Set aside a few minutes to talk to the Lord. Tell Him about whatever is on your mind. He loves you and is interested in you. He will listen.



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