

**The Parables of the Sower and of the Wheat and the Tares**

Passages: Mt 13:1–23; Mk 4:1–20; Lk 8:1–15; Mt 13:24–30, 36–43

*Memory Verse*

“But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard of the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.” (Luke 8:15)

<b>Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]</b>	<b>Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]</b>	<b>Good Work [Behavior]</b>
Jesus taught the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven through parables.	Jesus is the sower who has sown the seed of the gospel for all to hear.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Hear the word of God and understand it, so that we can bear fruit.</li><li>2. Shine for the Lord.</li><li>3. Be rooted in the truth.</li></ol>

*Overview*

**Events and Spiritual Teachings**

- A. The Parable of the Sower (Mt 13:3–9, 18–23)
  - **Life Application:** Do I Bear Fruit for Christ in My Life?
- B. The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Mt 13:24–30)
  - **Life Application:** Reflect God’s Divine Nature and Be Rooted in the Truth

**Memory Verse**

**Conclusion:** God expects us to bear the fruit of a Christ-like character.

## Spiritual Teachings

### Introduction: Understanding Parables

Jesus taught many parables in the Bible. The word “parable” is derived from the Greek root word *paraballo*, which means “to come alongside or compare.” A parable often compares two ideas or objects to teach a principle or a concept. Parables can illustrate spiritual concepts in a way that plain language cannot.

Jesus spoke in parables for two reasons. First, He wanted to reveal the truth to those who had a deep desire to learn. Second, He wanted to conceal the truth from those who were indifferent. These included the Pharisees, a group of Jews who publicly rejected Him and His teachings. The parables that Jesus shared meant nothing to them because of their calloused hearts. But for the believers, the parables served to reveal the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. That is why Jesus said in Mark 4:9, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (BSG: Matthew, 220).<sup>1</sup>

### A. The Parable of the Sower (Mt 13:3–9, 18–23)

Do you know the ingredients necessary for producing a harvest with abundant fruit? Good soil and healthy seeds! In addition, an experienced gardener who will look after the seeds and tend the soil is crucial to a bountiful harvest. This is the central teaching in the parable of the sower. Let’s turn our focus to Matthew, chapter 13, which begins with a large crowd gathered around Jesus (Mt 13:2).

In His first set of parables, Jesus used everyday examples to teach important truths about those who have been called to the kingdom of heaven. Jesus began by sharing the story of a man sowing seeds in a field. Let’s read Matthew 13:3–9 to see what Jesus shared.

### Elements of the Parable of the Sower

Element	Representation	References
Seed	The word of God	Lk 8:11; 1 Pet 1:23, 25; Mk 4:28–29
The Sower	Jesus, preacher, member	Heb 2:2–3; Mt 3:1–2; Ps 126:5–6
Ground	The condition of our hearts	Mt 13:19, 23; 1 Cor 3:6–9

### The Four Types of Ground

The parable of the sower concerns a sower who scatters seed that falls on four types of ground.

Wayside	The <b>wayside</b> (hard ground) prevents the seed from sprouting at all, so the seed become nothing more than bird food.
Stony places	The <b>stony places</b> provide enough soil for the seed to germinate and begin to grow, but because there is “no depth of earth,” the plants do not take root and soon wither in the sun.
Thorny places	The <b>thorny places</b> allow the seed to grow, but the competing thorns choke the life out of the beneficial plants.
Good ground	The <b>good ground</b> allows the seed to grow and bear much fruit.

<sup>1</sup> TJC Department of Literary Ministry, “Segment Analysis 8a,” *Bible Study Guide: Matthew*, (USA: True Jesus Church, 2002), 220.

Now that we have examined the parable and its elements, let us continue reading to see how Jesus explained its meaning. We will first turn to and read Matthew 13:18–23, and then examine the following chart (*BSG: Matthew, 220*).<sup>2</sup>

Ground Type	Representation		Result
<b>Wayside</b> (hard ground)	Hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it (v. 19).		The wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart (v. 19).
	<b>Teaching</b>	The “word of the kingdom”: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● God is the Creator</li> <li>● Man has original sin</li> <li>● God’s salvation plan</li> <li>● Heavenly hope</li> <li>● The teachings of how to be saved</li> </ul>	Birds represent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Wicked one (Gospel of Matthew)</li> <li>● Satan (Gospel of Mark)</li> <li>● Devil (Gospel of Luke)</li> </ul>
<b>Stony Places</b>	Hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; has no root, so can only endure for a while (vv. 20–21).		When tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles (v. 21).
	<b>Teaching</b>	What causes individuals to have “no root”? They do not seek a relationship with God daily or keep the word of God in their hearts. They can be scorched and will wither away when tribulation comes. Similarly, anyone can develop a stony heart if they are not rooted.	Matthew 7:26–27 emphasize the peril of a weak foundation. One without roots is like “a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell.” Conversely, one with a strong foundation “shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes” (Jer 17:8).
<b>Thorny Places</b>	Hears the word, but worldly cares and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word (v. 22).		He becomes unfruitful (v. 22).
	<b>Teaching</b>	What is the deceitfulness of riches? When our priorities are fixed on wealth or material things. The root of all kinds of evil is not money itself, but the love of money (1 Tim 6:10). When a person sets his mind on the desires of the flesh and the accumulation of riches, he easily wanders from the faith.	Love for the world robs us of our love for God (1 Tim 6:9–10; 1 Jn 2:15–16; Mt 6:19–24). Jesus said, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Lk 12:15). Our physical lives are temporary. Focusing on our earthly desires, what we eat, or what we wear, prevents us from seeking God’s kingdom and bearing fruit according to His will (Lk 12:31).
<b>Good Ground</b>	Hears the word with a noble heart and good heart and understands it (Mt 13:23; Lk 8:15).		Bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty (v. 23).

<sup>2</sup> “Segment Analysis,” *Bible Study Guide: Matthew, 219–220*

	<b>Teaching</b>	<p>The Bible teaches us, “He who is of God hears God’s words” (Jn 8:47), and “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” (Mt 5:3, 6).</p> <p>Only good ground can produce much fruit. When the ground is not properly tended, it affects the crops. Therefore, it must be tended and fertilized with the right amount of nutrients. Then the seed can germinate, and the roots can reach deep down, allowing the crop to produce and bear fruit.</p>
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*“Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken away from him.”*

(Luke 8:18)

### **Life Application**

#### **Do I Bear Fruit for Christ in My Life?**

The parable of the sower concludes by describing the seed that fell on good ground, which “yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Mt 13:8). How can we prepare ourselves to be that good ground and bear fruit? In Luke 8:15, Jesus described the good ground as “those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.”

We have received the eternal word of God. But it is our responsibility to make sure that we “walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him” (Col 2:6–7). Therefore, we need to set our priorities straight and take the right path to ensure that we can bear fruit.

#### **1. Step One: Abide in Him (Jn 15:4–8)**

A branch must be firmly attached to the vine, its source of nourishment and strength, in order to stay alive. Likewise, we must stay connected to our Lord Jesus in order to bear fruit. So, how do we abide in Jesus?

- Have daily devotion and prayer with our Lord Jesus. Without this direct connection to our Lord Jesus, our lives become fruitless.
- Walk in the Spirit daily and turn from fulfilling the lusts of the flesh (Gal 5:16)
- Attend church services, have fellowship with brothers and sisters, serve the members, and stay in the true church.

#### **2. Step Two: Allow God’s Word to Take Root Within Me**

Just as a seed takes root in good soil, God’s word takes root in a receptive heart. We need to receive God’s word eagerly (1 Pet 2:2). Meditate on it (Ps 119:97), keep it in our hearts (Ps 119:11), and put it into practice (Heb 5:14) so that it becomes an integral part of us (*BSG: Matthew, 220*)<sup>3</sup>.

#### **3. Step Three: Walk in the Spirit**

The only way to bear fruit is by maintaining an intimate relationship with our Lord Jesus daily and walking in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit within us allows us to bear good fruit (Gal 5:22–23). Jesus has chosen us to go and bear everlasting fruit (Jn 15:4, 8): love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22). The more we walk in the Spirit and allow the Holy Spirit to take control of our thoughts, our emotions, and our will, the more fruit we will bear.

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<sup>3</sup> “Segment Analysis 3,” *Bible Study Guide: Matthew*, 219

## B. The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Mt 13:24–30)

Jesus gives us this parable immediately after the parable of the sower. Let us read Matthew 13:24–30. Now that we have read the parable, let us study Matthew 13:37–43 to learn how Jesus explained the parable.

### Elements of the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares

Element	Representation	Significance
The sower	The Son of Man (v. 37)	
The field	*The world (v. 38)	
Good seeds	The sons of the kingdom (v. 38)	Will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father (v. 43)
Tares	The sons of the wicked one (v. 38)	Will be wailing and gnashing teeth (v. 42)
The enemy	The devil (v. 39)	
The harvest	The end of this age (v. 39)	
The reapers	The angels (v. 41)	Will gather those who offend and practice lawlessness and cast them into the furnace of fire (vv. 41–42)

\*Jesus is teaching about “the kingdom of heaven” (v. 24) in the world.

The central teaching of the parable of the sower reveals that when we preach the gospel to others, the condition of their hearts will affect how they respond. In the parable of the wheat and the tares, Jesus imparts to us another crucial teaching regarding the kingdom of heaven: harmful tares can grow among the good wheat, making it difficult to remove the tares without also removing the wheat. Thus, it is more beneficial to wait until the harvest to separate them. When the kingdom of heaven comes to its fruition, the tares will be removed from among the wheat and burned.

### The Works of Satan

Did you know that a tare closely resembles young wheat? It is only when the wheat begins to develop its head that the tare becomes discernable. Imagine what these invasive tares can do!

Satan can take on disguises to deceive us (2 Cor 11:14). He can appear to be good wheat when, in reality, he is a harmful tare. Satan attempts to destroy God’s work by placing in the world false believers and false teachers in the world whose mission it is to lead the children of God astray. They may pretend to be the Christ (Mt 24:4–5), or they may be false apostles or ministers (2 Cor 11:13–15) who preach false doctrines and perform miracles (Heb 13:9; 2 Thess 2:7–12).

Let’s read 1 Peter 5:8: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” We must always remember that Satan roams around like a roaring lion. When we preach the gospel, he puts great effort into devouring the weak by using deception. So we must exercise self-control and be alert, “for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). For these reasons, we need to be deeply rooted in biblical teachings.

### God’s Judgment Will Come Soon

“Let both grow together until the harvest” (Mt 13:30). The owner had no intention of leaving the wheat with the tares indefinitely. At “the end of the age,” the tares will be gathered and burned, at which time there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Who will be doing this reaping? God’s angels.

*When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.*

(Mt 25:31–33)

On the day Jesus returns, all unbelievers will be judged for their sin and unbelief and removed from God’s presence. Those who are the good wheat, who follow God wholeheartedly, will reign with Him forever and “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Mt 13:43).

### **Life Application: Reflect God’s Divine Nature and Be Rooted in the Truth**

There are two teachings from this parable that we can apply to our lives while we are waiting for the angels to reap the harvest:

1. We will live side by side with the worldly and wicked people until the end of the age. Therefore, we must “let [our] light so shine before men, that they may see [our] good works and glorify [our] Father in heaven” (Mt 5:16).
2. Harmful tares are all around us. If we are not rooted in the truth (Col 2:7), we are giving Satan the opportunity to devour us. Therefore, the only way we can defend against Satan is to know the truth (Jn 8:32) and learn to defend it. In addition, we must continuously draw upon God’s strength through the power of the Holy Spirit (Lk 24:49). The more we actively practice what we believe, the more we can discern and defend against Satan.

### **Check for Understanding**

1. **In the parable of the sower, what does the ground represent?** The ground represents the condition of our hearts.
2. **What are the four types of ground? What are their conditions and the results of their conditions?**
  - a. Wayside – Hears the word of the kingdom, but does not understand it → Wicked one comes and snatches away the word
  - b. Stony places – Hears and receives the word with joy, but has no root → Stumbles when tribulation or persecution arises
  - c. Thorny places – Hears the word, but cares of the world and deceitfulness of riches choke it → Becomes unfruitful
  - d. Good ground – Hears the word with noble and good heart and understands it → Bears fruit
3. **What do the wheat and tares represent in the parable of the wheat and the tares?** The wheat represents the sons of the kingdom; the tares represent the sons of the wicked one.
4. **What will happen to the wheat and the tares during the end of the age?** The angels will gather the tares, which will be burned. The wheat will “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

### **Memory Verse**

“But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard of the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.” (Luke 8:15)

## Meaning

1. **Good ground:** This is ground that has a noble and good heart. A person whose heart embodies this type of ground leaves the door open for God's word to enter. He or she recognizes that everything you need can be found in God. For this reason, a person whose heart is good ground will keep God's word and bear fruit with patience.
2. **Being fruitful:** When we bear good fruit, we glorify God. He said, "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit" (Mt 12:33). "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Mt 7:19). Ultimately, God wants us to bear "the fruit of righteousness" (Jas 3:18). In order to produce the best fruit, you must have the fullness of the Holy Spirit. "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (Jn 15:8). Therefore, we must strive to be fruitful.

## Conclusion

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When preaching, the gospel of the kingdom is responded to in many different ways. While the message may have no effect on one individual, the same message may compel others to bear fruit. The condition of a person's heart determines whether God's word will have an effect on him and whether he is worthy of God's kingdom. The Lord has called us to heed and accept the message of the gospel (Heb 2:1–3). So, we must humbly open our heart to receive and act upon it. Those who do not respond to the Lord's calling will have no part in God's kingdom (Mt 13:11, 13).

God expects us to bear the fruit of a Christ-like character. When we receive God's word and put it into practice, our conduct and lifestyle will naturally reflect God's divine qualities for the glory of God (Phil 1:11; Col 1:6; Gal 5:22–23; Jn 15:8, 16–17).

We should not be surprised that harvest time is drawing near, as we are approaching the end of the age. We must stand firm in the truth. Judgment will not be pleasant, for no threshing could be. The lake of fire will bring intense pain and anguish for the wicked. This is the everlasting fire prepared for the wicked. Then, the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Mt 13:43).

## Lesson 1 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What kind of heart is required for us to become “good ground”?  
*We must have a noble and good heart, as well as leave the door open for God’s word to enter. Our heart must recognize that everything we need can be found in God.*
2. Explain the four types of ground and what they represent.
  - a. *Wayside – Hears the word of the kingdom, but does not understand it → Wicked one comes and snatches away the word*
  - b. *Stony places – Hears and receives the word with joy, but has no root → Stumbles when tribulation or persecution arises*
  - c. *Thorny places – Hears the word, but cares of the world and deceitfulness of riches choke it → Becomes unfruitful*
  - d. *Good ground – Hears the word with noble and good heart and understands it → Bears fruit*
3. What three steps or actions are necessary to become “good ground” and bear fruit for God?  
*Abide in God and stay connected to Him in our daily lives; be receptive to the word by receiving it eagerly, meditating on it, keeping it in our hearts, and practicing it so that it becomes an integral part of our lives; and maintain an intimate relationship with God by walking in the Spirit and allowing it to control our thoughts, emotions, and our will.*
4. What two warnings does the parable of the wheat and the tares teach us?  
*First, we must be wary of the tares—works of Satan designed to deceive us and make us fall, such as false prophets, false Christs, and false teachings—living side by side with us. Second, God’s judgment will come soon, and it will not be pleasant, for the tares will be separated to be thrown into the fire, while the wheat will be preserved to shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.*
5. In what two ways do we need to act on these warnings?  
*Because we will be living among the tares, we must live in a way that reflects God’s divine nature with good works and good conduct. Second, we must be rooted in the truth, otherwise we will be easily pulled away from God. To defend ourselves, we must know the truth, defend it, and continuously draw upon God’s strength through the Holy Spirit.*
6. What kind of “tares” do you think are in your own life? How can you avoid them?  
*Personal answer.*