

MARK 4:1-13, 21-34 Again he began to teach beside the lake. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the lake and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the lake on the land. **2**He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: **3**'Listen! A sower went out to sow. **4**And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. **5**Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. **6**And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. **7**Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. **8**Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.' **9**And he said, 'Let anyone with ears to hear listen!' **10** When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. **11**And he said to them, 'To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; **12**in order that "they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven." ' **13** And he said to them, 'Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? [...] **21** He said to them, 'Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand? **22**For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. **23**Let anyone with ears to hear listen!' **24**And he said to them, 'Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. **25**For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.' **26** He also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, **27**and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. **28**The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. **29**But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.' **30** He also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? **31**It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; **32**yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'
33 With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; **34**he did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.



What principles of growth do you see here?

The Process of Maturity

- Jesus was always inviting people to step into the next level of maturity – growth and movement are endemic to the process
- Jesus was **doing** what he was **speaking** about! The ministry of Parable in word and deed'
- Jesus used this model in his development of the disciples as leaders.

The Model: Ministry As Parable

1. Sow Opportunities – be “reckless”, take risks, give away ministry.

2. Discern Responsiveness – look for “good soil”; those able to hear, perceive and understand; readiness to follow through.

3. Invest Wisely – the wise farmer embraces discipline and mystery. How can I help them succeed? How do I need to be praying for them?

We traditionally only think of this parable in terms of evangelism – but this seems to be how Jesus operated the whole time! The process of growing in maturity follows this cycle repeatedly. Jesus did not seem overly concerned about distinguishing evangelism from discipleship from leadership development.

- Notice in the Gospels how Jesus was always sowing, always developing, always sending – can you think of examples of these?

APPLICATION

1. Susan is a freshman from a Christian home. She came on campus searching for a Christian group to be a part of. She quickly adapted into fellowship life and IV has become her hobby. You can tell she is struggling with the secular campus culture. You have tried to be supportive of what she is feeling, as well as offering her suggestions for how to manage some of the tension she is feeling. Last week in small group it was obvious that she was upset about being on campus and feeling isolated and alone in her classes and dorms. She also mentioned a conversation she had with her roommate about spiritual things and you cringed at some of the things she said.

2. The leadership team at your campus has traditionally done a great job at sustaining the ministry. You have a great small group ministry and the quality of large group increases each year. Christian students feel well cared for and leaders see their role as managing the ministry. Next year four new sophomore leaders will join the team. They all have big dreams for the fellowship to be a place where they can invite their friends and are asking questions like, “What is the fellowship for on campus?” At the first gathering of the new leadership team, the new leaders are vocal about what they hope to contribute as new leaders. Most of the old leaders looked either scared or confused. The few that spoke seemed a bit defensive.

3. Josh is a rising senior and an incredibly gifted student. He takes a lot of initiative with people and is known for his creative and memorable teaching. In his three years on campus he has led in a variety of ways. He never loses his fervor to lead or have influence but has not entrusted leadership to the students around him. He views many of his peers in the fellowship as “lukewarm” Christians and does not think they are in a place spiritually to lead.

1. What kind of invitations might be opportunities for these people to grow in maturity and initiative towards others?
2. What kind of leadership would they need from you in this situation, both in approaching them and helping them succeed?

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What principles of growth do you see here?

- Kingdom of God is meant to grow!
– (size, fruitfulness, insiders, made more manifest)
- Sow broadly, "recklessly"
- The soil's type is determined by its responsiveness, not by different quality seed
- "the measure you give is the measure you get" (RSV)
- things meant to be found
- Secret of the KOG? – some kind of response
- There is process and rightful order to how a seed grows
- Also mystery- "he knows not how"
– the work of God
- Use it or lose it
- Mustard seed has tremendous 'potential energy', not obvious
- Everyone gets parables, insiders get more, the 12 get the most
- An invitation for everyone
- In agriculture, risk is inherent

How do you "get more" in Jesus' schema?

- Respond to what he gives (teaching, principle, invitation, challenge), invest yourself, be fertile soil, take a risk, try it - do something with it (10 minas), ask for more, come to him, believe the kingdom works this way, seek, look, knock, follow...but do something!
- Jesus teaches in parables precisely because it forces one to respond...

The Process of Maturity

Is this passage about evangelism? Discipleship? Leadership development?..... Yes! That is, Jesus is always interested in this process of moving people from the outside to the inside – creating followers, disciples, missionaries, apostles

SKETCHES of Leadership ● ● ● ● ●

- Jesus was always inviting people to step into the next level of maturity – growth and movement are endemic to the process
- Jesus was **doing** what he was **speaking** about! The ministry of Parable in word and deed'
- Jesus used this model in his development of the disciples as leaders.
- We are about giving people opportunities to grow – then we enter into the mystery and discipline of shepherding.

The Model: Ministry As Parable

1. Sow Opportunities – be “reckless”, take risks, give away ministry.
Break down tasks (what is involved in being a member, minister, leader, leader of leaders), invitations for everyone (and not just at the end of the year), be creative, stretch your comfort zone, loosen control...

2. Discern Responsiveness – look for “good soil”; those able to hear, perceive and understand; readiness to follow through.

Not necessarily competence (think of the 12!), failure is expected, the question is ‘who will bear fruit?’ – not ‘who likes me?’ Remember risk is relative.

3. Invest Wisely – the wise farmer embraces discipline and mystery. How can I help them succeed? How do I need to be praying for them?

We need discernment here too, not cookie cutter leadership. What disciplines do we need? What vision? There are many tools that can be utilized here – 5 Thresholds, Situational Leadership, Master Plan of Evangelism, Coaching, Spiritual Direction, Contagious Christian...

We traditionally only think of this parable in terms of evangelism – but this seems to be how Jesus operated the whole time! The process of growing in maturity follows this cycle repeatedly. Jesus did not seem overly concerned about distinguishing evangelism from discipleship from leadership development.

- We need to broaden how we think of leadership beyond just roles and titles. Love is in large part extending one’s self for the growth of another – intentionally seeking their good. How close that is to what we mean by leadership and influence, and how central to the gospel and Jesus’ life...
- Managing the tension between sowing widely and investing wisely – there definitely is a rhythm of expansion and contraction in ministry, being risky is different than being stupid or overextending yourself or those you lead, and this is why prayer and discernment are so key.

- Notice in the Gospels how Jesus was always sowing, always developing, always sending – can you think of examples of these?

APPLICATION Firstly, how are you responding to the new invitations being sown to you, by Jesus or another?

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