

Picture Stories



SABBATH—JULY 20

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Mark 4:1–9; Mark 4:13–20; Mark 4:10–12; Mark 4:21–23; Mark 4:26–29.

MEMORY VERSE: “Think carefully about the things you hear. The way you give to others [people] is the [same] way God will give to you. But God will give you more than you give. The person who has something will be given more. But the person who does not have much, even what he has will be taken [removed] from him” (Mark 4:24, 25, ICB).



We will read the picture stories and try to understand the important ideas Jesus wanted to teach.

THIS WEEK'S LESSON is about the picture stories in Mark 4.

Bible thinkers have argued over the meaning of Jesus' picture stories. How should we explain their meaning? What do His picture stories mean? Why did Jesus use picture stories? What lessons do they teach us? Should we understand them as symbols or word pictures? Or were the picture stories real stories?

For sure, we won't answer all these questions in this week's lesson. We will read the picture stories and try to understand the important ideas Jesus wanted to teach.

Mark 4 tells five picture stories: (1) the farmer, (2) the lamp, (3) the measuring basket, (4) the growing seed, and (5) the mustard seed. Most of Mark 4 talks about the farmer. Mark tells us this picture story first. Next, Mark gives us the reason that Jesus told picture stories. Then, Mark tells us what the story means. We will study this three-part plan for Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. We will study the other stories on Wednesday and Thursday.

PICTURE STORY: THE FARMER (Mark 4:1–9)

Read the picture story about the farmer in Mark 4:1–9. Mark talks about four different types of earth or ground. Name these four types and explain how they are different from each other. What happens to the seed that falls on them?

When people read Jesus' picture stories, they often want to read through them fast to get to the ending. They want to know about the lesson that Jesus wishes to teach. But Jesus often doesn't give us long explanations at the end of His picture stories.

So, we should slow down when we read each story and try to understand its meaning. Then we will understand better many of the ideas and lessons that the story is meant to teach us. In the picture story about the farmer, the same type of seed falls on four different types of dirt. The type of dirt changes what happens to the seed. The picture story about the farmer is really four stories in one.

What happens to the seeds? When the seeds fall on the road, the birds eat them. "While the farmer was planting, some seed fell by the road. The birds came and ate all that seed" (Mark 4:4, ICB).

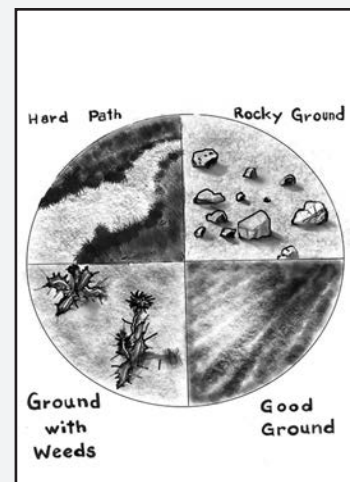
What happens to the seeds that fall on the rocky dirt? The sun burns them a few days later, and they die.

Some seeds fall in the thorny weeds. The weeds and thorns stop the seeds from growing, and they die, too.

Some seeds fall on the dirt in the field. These seeds grow all spring, summer, and fall until the farmer has a full crop.

The first three seed stories are about failure. The final story is about success. The picture story teaches us about what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Yes, there are risks. But God will reward us in a big way for following His Son.

What are some other spiritual lessons that nature teaches us?



In the picture story about the farmer, the same type of seed falls on four different types of dirt.

JESUS' EXPLANATION (Mark 4:13–20)

Jesus finished the picture story about the farmer. But He did not explain it right away. Mark 4:1 tells us that Jesus told the picture story in front of a big crowd of people. Later, Jesus explained the picture story when He was with a small group.

How does Jesus explain the picture story about the farmer? Read Mark 4:13–20 for the answer.



The different types of dirt are the different types of people who hear Jesus' message.

Jesus' explanation helps us to understand that the story is a picture story.

Jesus says that the seed is a symbol for the Word, which is the Bible. James 1:21 says, "So get rid of everything that is sinful. Get rid of the evil that is all around us. Don't be too proud [filled with pride] to accept the word [the Bible] that is planted [put] in you. It [the Bible] can save you" (NIRV).

The different types of dirt are the different types of people who hear Jesus' message. In Jesus' explanation, everyone hears Bible truth. His message is preached to everyone. But not everyone acts the same way when they hear it. The dirt on the road is hard, and the birds quickly grab the seed. Jesus says that the birds show us how Satan quickly takes a belief in Bible truth away from the people who hear it. Rocky dirt is not deep. So, this dirt is a symbol for people who make empty promises. They say they want to follow Jesus. But they haven't really thought about how much following Him will cost them in this life. The dirt filled with weeds causes the seeds that fall on it to die. Jesus explains that this weedy dirt is a symbol for riches and the cares of life. These things destroy our love for Bible truth. The good soil causes things to grow. This soil is a symbol for the people who hear Jesus' message and accept it. Then Bible truth grows in the heart and makes a big "crop."

The longest explanations are for the rocky dirt and the weedy dirt. The people who are the same as the rocky dirt accept Jesus' message with joy. But when they must suffer for their faith, they reject the message. The people who are the same as the weedy dirt don't reject the message because of hard times. They reject the message because of good times. They love the things this life offers them more than they love God.

THE REASON THAT JESUS TOLD PICTURE STORIES (Mark 4:10–12)

Why did Jesus use picture stories to teach His lessons? Read Mark 4:10–12 for the answer.

We must pay careful attention to Jesus' words in Mark 4:10–12 to understand what He is saying. These verses use a quote from Isaiah 6:9, 10. If you don't read these verses carefully, you may get the wrong idea. You may think that Jesus used picture stories to hide what He was really saying from some people. But that idea is false. Jesus wanted to help people understand and accept His teachings.

In Mark 3:5, 6, the hard hearts of the Jewish leaders make Jesus sad. In Mark 3:22–30, Jesus takes time to explain why their ideas are wrong. In Mark 12:1–12, the Jewish leaders understand that Jesus' picture story is really about them. Jesus tells the picture story to warn the leaders about what will happen if they try to kill Him. Jesus cares for the leaders. So, He tries to warn them.

Read Isaiah 6:1–13. What happened to Isaiah? What message does the Lord give Isaiah to tell Israel?

Isaiah sees a vision of God's glory in the temple. Isaiah feels very dirty when he sees this vision. God makes Isaiah clean. Then God tells Isaiah to give Israel a surprising message. The message is meant to warn the people to stop doing evil.

In Mark 4:10–12, we find the same message. These verses help us understand why Jesus used picture stories to teach. If we want to understand Jesus' words and teachings, we must obey God. When we obey God, we will become part of Jesus' family (Mark 3:35). The Jews who decided that Jesus was filled with Satan won't listen to His message or obey Him.

Jesus quotes Isaiah 6 to show us an important Bible truth: God doesn't keep people out of heaven because He is mean. Their own ideas and hard hearts keep them from accepting saving truth.

Each one of us chooses what type of "dirt" we will become. Everyone decides if they will, or will not, surrender to Jesus. In the end, we make the choice.



Each one of us chooses what type of "dirt" we will become.

PICTURE STORIES: LAMP AND MEASURING BASKET
(Mark 4:21–23)

Read the picture story about the lamp in Mark 4:21–23. What important lesson does Jesus teach in this story?

In Jesus' day, many houses were built around a yard. The yard had walls around it. Some houses were big. Other houses were small. Big or small, the house is a word picture that teaches us an important rule: in the future, everyone will know the Bible truth about Jesus.

Jesus asks two questions in Mark 4:21. "Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a large bowl or a bed?" (NIRV). Of course not! Next, Jesus asks, "Don't you put it [the lamp] on its stand?" (NIRV). Of course you do! Lamps give light. If a lamp doesn't give light, why keep it? Mark 4:22 explains the picture story about the lamp. Everything secret will be made public. Jesus is talking about the Good News.



**If a lamp doesn't give light,
why keep it?**

Read the picture story about the measuring basket in Mark 4:24, 25. What lesson does Jesus teach us in this picture story?

In many places on earth, fresh fruit and vegetables are sold in outdoor markets. Sellers use a basket to measure how much the fruit or vegetable weighs. The basket helps the sellers to figure out how much money the food costs. Some sellers add extra food to a sale to help their buyers feel that they are getting a good deal. Jesus uses this idea about how sellers are fair to buyers to teach an important Bible truth. If we follow Bible truth, God will give us more knowledge. But if we reject the Bible truth that God gives us, we will lose the small amount of Bible truth that we had.

How can we learn better the important rule that God will show us the same mercy that we show to other people? Think about this rule in all your friendships and relationships with other people.

TWO PICTURE STORIES: THE GROWING SEED (Mark 4:26–29) AND THE MUSTARD SEED (Mark 4:30–32)

Read the picture story in Mark 4:26–29. What important lesson does this picture story teach?

This picture story talks about growth. People help the kingdom of God to grow. But the real growth happens because of God’s work. The story ends when the grain or wheat becomes full grown. In the same way, when Jesus comes back, history will end.

Read the picture story in Mark 4:30–32. What important lesson do we learn from this story about the mustard seed?

This picture story shows how something very tiny grows into something very big. Mustard seeds are as small as 1 to 2 millimeters in size (0.039 to 0.079 inches). The plant in the picture story may be the black mustard. The black mustard plant has tiny seeds (more than 700 seeds in one gram). Black mustard seeds aren’t the smallest seeds on earth. But they are very small compared to the plant they become. The full-grown black mustard plant can grow as large as 3 meters (10 feet) tall. Jesus says that birds nest in the branches of the mustard plant. This word picture about the birds helps us remember Psalm 104:12 and Daniel 4:10–12. In Psalm 104:12, the poet talks about our powerful God who made the earth. Daniel 4 compares King Nebuchadnezzar to a tree who gives food and protection to all the people on the earth.

Jesus wants us to understand that the kingdom of God is the same as the mustard seed in the way that it grows. God’s kingdom is small at first. But it grows and becomes very large.

People in Jesus’ day may have laughed at Jesus and wondered how His words will happen when He had a small group of followers. But time has shown that His kingdom continues to grow and fill the earth.

“ ‘The Good News about God’s kingdom will be preached in all the world [earth], to every nation [people group]. Then the end will come’ ” (Matthew 24:14, ICB). Think about how small the “church” was when Jesus said these words. Why is this promise so wonderful for us today? How does it make our faith grow strong?



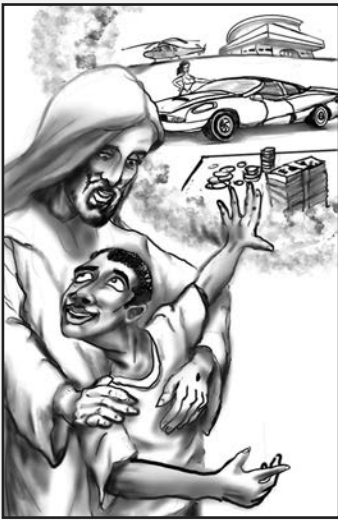
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ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘The Sower Went Forth to Sow,’ ” pages 33–61, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

“How do you become holy? You give your whole self to God and serve Him. Jesus asks for our whole heart. He wants us to give Him our minds, our spirits, and our strength, too. We must not be selfish. If we live for ourselves, we are not Christians.

“Love must be the reason for everything we do. Love is the foundation of God’s government in heaven and on earth. Our words, thoughts, and feelings must show our love. Only love will make us loyal and keep us loyal to God. Love will help us to stay strong when Satan tries to get us to sin.

“We show our love in the things we give up for Jesus. God’s plan to save us includes the gift He gave to save us. Jesus gave up everything to save us. When we accept Jesus, we will be ready to give up everything for Jesus. We will put Him first in our lives. We will care more about His honor and glory than anything else.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pages 48, 49, adapted.



“When we accept Jesus, we will be ready to give up everything for Jesus.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① “Love must be the reason for everything we do. Love is the foundation of God’s government in heaven and on earth.” How does the Cross show this amazing Bible truth to us? How can we show this same love in our own lives? Why must we do so?
- ② What if someone said that Jesus told picture stories to keep His teachings a secret from some people? Would Jesus really do that when He died for everyone on earth (read 1 John 2:2)? Explain your answer.
- ③ We put lamps on lampstands, not under baskets (Mark 4:21)! How does this important rule help you to “shine” the same as a light in your community? How can you make your light shine more brightly?
- ④ Think some more about the picture story in Mark 4:26–29. How do we help “plant” the Good News in people’s hearts? Also, how do we help the Good News to “grow”? What is God’s part in this work? Why do we need to depend on God for everything if we want to grow?

PART 1: A FIGHT ABOUT THE SABBATH

Father wasn't worried when Mother attended Seventh-day Adventist meetings at their town's schoolhouse in Armenia. Father also wasn't worried when Mother got baptized.

Father wasn't worried when his daughter Anush and her sister started going to Adventist summer camps. Father often drove his daughters to camp.

Father wasn't worried, later on, when Anush decided to get baptized. She was a 17-year-old university student at the time. Father also wasn't worried when Anush wanted to join the Adventist Church.

But Father was angry when someone from the university called to complain about Anush not going to classes on Sabbath.

A university leader told Father, "If Anush doesn't want to go to class because of the Sabbath, she doesn't need to go. But why does she need to tell everyone about her reasons for not going? She is causing people to lose respect for our school."

Father was upset. He thought that Anush's faith made his family look bad. Father scolded Anush when she came home.

Father said, "Why did you have to announce your reasons for not going to class at the university? If you are going to behave this way, then I forbid you to go to church."

Father also refused to allow Anush to get baptized.

Father told Anush, "When you're older, you can make your own decisions. But for now I'm in charge of you."

Anush didn't argue. In Armenia, a father's word is law. But Anush wondered, Was there a way she could go to church and honor Father at the same time? Anush promised God she would get baptized. But she worried that if she got baptized, Father would not allow Mother to go to church. Mother suggested that Anush wait. Mother found support for a delay in Numbers 30:3-5. These verses talk about the daughter who makes a promise or an oath while she lives in her father's house. If her father approves of the promise, God accepts it. But if the daughter makes a promise that her father doesn't like, then God releases the daughter from her promise.

Mother told Anush, "I think God supports the decision to wait to get baptized."

Anush waited. The next four years at university were hard for her. Anush believed that Father was a good man who wanted only what was best for her. But Anush also wanted to attend church and get baptized. Anush was happy when a classmate got baptized. The classmate first learned about the Sabbath when Anush refused to go to class on that day. This classmate became the first person that Anush won for Jesus.

INSIDE
Story

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Mother found support for a delay in Numbers 30:3-5.