

Jesus uses a farming illustration to teach about hearing God's word.

Isaiah 6:9–10; Matthew 13:1–23; Mark 4:1–20; Luke 8:4–15

Later that day, Jesus left the house and again taught by the seashore. A large crowd gathered from many towns, so many that he boarded a boat, sat down, and from there taught the people who stood on the shore.

He taught them with illustrations, saying, “Listen! A farmer went to sow his seeds in the field. As he scattered the seeds, some fell on the road, where they were trampled and eaten by the birds. Some fell on rocky ground, where the soil had little depth. The plants sprang up but had shallow roots, so they soon wilted for lack of moisture under the scorching sun. Some seeds fell among thorny weeds that grew more quickly and choked out the tender plants, preventing growth of the grain. Other seeds fell on fertile soil and became healthy plants, producing thirty, sixty, or a hundred times the amount of seed sown. If you have ears, pay attention to what I am saying.”

Later, when Jesus was alone with the twelve and other followers, his disciples asked what the illustration meant. “Why do you teach with stories that are difficult to understand?”

Jesus said, “I have given you insights into the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others have only the stories. Those who have a desire to hear will be given an abundance of knowledge, but those who dislike the truth will lose what little understanding they have. I teach with stories because some people with open eyes choose to see nothing. They listen with their ears but do not want to understand. In them, the prophet Isaiah's words are fulfilled: *You listen but do not understand. You see but have no recognition. Harden the hearts of these people and close their ears and cover their eyes so they will not see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts and be forced to turn to me and be healed.*

“How fortunate you are to have eyes that see and ears that hear. I assure you, many prophets and righteous people have wanted to see what you are seeing. They wanted to hear what you are hearing, but they could not.

“If you do not understand this illustration, you will not understand any other. This is the meaning of the farmer sowing seeds. The seed is the word of God. The farmer is a person who takes God’s word to others. The seeds that fell on the road are people who hear the Kingdom message but do not understand. The devil takes away the seed that was planted in their hearts and prevents them from believing and being saved. The seeds that fell on rocky ground are those who hear the message and eagerly accept it, but their roots are shallow. As soon as the message causes them to experience trouble or persecution, they forsake their faith. The seeds that fell among thorny weeds are the people who allow the worries of this life, the enticement of wealth, and the pleasures of this life to choke the message, so no fruit is produced. The seeds that fell on fertile soil are those who hear, understand, and act on God’s word, yielding a huge harvest—thirty, sixty, or a hundred times what was sown.”