

Home Group Leaders' Notes

Week of February 1, 2026

Mark 4:1-34

As we study through the book of Mark, we are answering three very important questions:

Who is Jesus, why did He come, and what does this mean for us? There are many more questions answered, but we must answer these if we are going to live in God's blessing, now and forevermore. We are also learning about discipleship – what it means to know, love, and follow Jesus as His disciple. One thing is very clear throughout the New Testament: we were made to follow Him TOGETHER. This is where Home Groups apply. Together, we learn, we encourage, we strengthen, we build, and bear fruit that lasts. We are here to draw near to God, become like Jesus, and help others follow Him as disciples. We are striving to do life and mission TOGETHER. Let's Go!

SELECTIVE HEARING?

In this week's passage, Jesus is speaking and some people are listening and some are not. There are times when we have "selective hearing." Can you think of times when someone has said that you aren't listening – like when you are watching TV or focused on a project? Or, when someone wants you to 'hear' but you are choosing to ignore? Yep, we do that.

TIPS FOR UNDERSTANDING MARK 4.

Below are a few thoughts that might be helpful as you read and discuss the passage.

"**Parables**" (v. 2) were /are used by Jesus as illustrations, analogies, or sayings to communicate truth. As we learn later, some understood because they were 'insiders' – those who believe, but others couldn't understand (see or hear) because they did not believe. Parables had the effect of revealing truth to some and concealing understanding from others. Mark Strauss (Exegetical Commentary on Mark) offers two tips for understanding Jesus' parables: (1) view them in the context of Jesus' ministry and His proclamation of the kingdom of God, and (2) allegorical elements should relate directly to the immediate context (and not to something that happens or occurs later.)

The phrase, "**Whoever has ears to hear**" recalls previous times when the prophets Jeremiah (5:21) and Ezekiel (12:2) pointed out that the disbelieving people (disobedient, rebellious) had eyes but could not see and ears but could not hear. Here, Jesus was perhaps referring to opponents such as we see in 3:6 and 3:22 who could not "hear" because of their hardness of heart and/or calling people in the crowds who did not yet believe to heed Jesus' words.

Verse 12 is tricky to translate and understand ("lest they should turn and be forgiven"). We know that God wants people to turn to Him in repentance and belief and be forgiven. Notice that this statement from Jesus is an explanation for why He taught using parables (10-12). Jesus referred to Isaiah 6:9-10 which is God commanding Isaiah to preach to the hard-hearted Jews on whom God was bringing judgment for years of rebellion. The parables of Jesus would function in the same manner. His teaching would either reveal truth of the kingdom to those with a humble heart (and therefore be forgiven) or conceal the truth from those with hard hearts. Some will repent and believe and be saved. (Here, Jesus is also saying that some He encountered had stubborn hearts.)

WALK THROUGH THE PASSAGE TOGETHER

Read through Mark 4:1-34.

What are your overall observations from this passage?

- Unlike other chapters, this is all Jesus teaching
- There are two groups: The disciples and the crowd
- The focus is on the kingdom of God
- The other parables focus on the future of the kingdom of God

As we have seen, Jesus' mission was to proclaim the message of "the Kingdom of God." How are we to understand the parable of the soils in relation to the kingdom of God? What is the key point? In what way was this the primary parable of this passage? (1-9, 13-20)

- The soils represent how people will respond to the kingdom of God
- Many will be interested and even show some response but not continue.
- Others will continue / persevere / endure and be fruitful
- This is primary because it describes choices, responses, and results of people who hear the kingdom message of Jesus

What was Jesus' purpose in using parables? What do we learn about the audience? (10-12)

- His purpose was to communicate the good news in a way that would both reveal and conceal
- Those who believe / are insiders / who follow in obedience will understand, learn, and keep moving forward.
- Those who reject Jesus will not understand – God will conceal the message of the parables

What do we learn about the kingdom of God from these parables? (21-32)

- God has a sovereign plan to grow the kingdom
- This good news of the kingdom is meant to be revealed, made known, put on a stand so people can see
- God does the growing of the kingdom even though we are a part of His works and it is somewhat mysterious
- His kingdom will start small and end great/large

In chapter three, Jesus contrasted 'insiders' with 'outsiders,' those who do the will of God and those who don't. Those who followed Him were called disciples (3:7). What do we learn about disciples and discipleship from this passage?

I hope God will give you helpful and encouraging discussion questions as we walk through "Mark" and discuss discipleship. Each week, those preaching will refer to Jesus' call to discipleship and perhaps what He did to make disciples (Like ask good questions!).

DISCUSS IT FURTHER

As we look back through the first three chapters in "Mark," what do we learn about Jesus' identity and purpose?

Sharing question

What do we learn about those who are ‘insiders’ to the kingdom of God? What is their identity and purpose? What characterizes a disciple?

Sharing questions

What questions do you have about Jesus’ judging between insiders and outsiders, between those who are and aren’t forgiven, etc.?

Sharing question

READY TO TAKE NEXT STEPS?

This is getting intense. We all like the idea of being in “the kingdom of God.” But we are learning that Jesus’ call to “repent and believe” is more than moment, more than a quick conversation, more than a nod. What have you learned about Jesus and about following Him as a disciple? Have you had a transparent conversation with anyone about where you stand? If not, ask God to direct you to connect with someone that you trust and share your questions, your direction, and your feelings about following Jesus in His kingdom.