

**DAY 1 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER (“SOAP”)****CONVERSATION STARTER**

Are you attracted or intimidated by things you don’t initially understand?

**SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION**

One time Jesus entered a house, and the crowds began to gather again. Soon he and his disciples couldn’t even find time to eat. When his family heard what was happening, they tried to take him away. “He’s out of his mind,” they said.

But the teachers of religious law who had arrived from Jerusalem said, “He’s possessed by Satan, the prince of demons. That’s where he gets the power to cast out demons.”

Jesus called them over and responded with an illustration. “How can Satan cast out Satan?” he asked. “A kingdom divided by civil war will collapse. Similarly, a family splintered by feuding will fall apart. And if Satan is divided and fights against himself, how can he stand? He would never survive. Let me illustrate this further. Who is powerful enough to enter the house of a strong man and plunder his goods? Only someone even stronger—someone who could tie him up and then plunder his house.

“I tell you the truth, all sin and blasphemy can be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. This is a sin with eternal consequences.” He told them this because they were saying, “He’s possessed by an evil spirit.”

Then Jesus’ mother and brothers came to see him. They stood outside and sent word for him to come out and talk with them. There was a crowd sitting around Jesus, and someone said, “Your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you.”

Jesus replied, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” Then he looked at those around him and said, “Look, these are my mother and brothers. Anyone who does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” **Mark 3:20–35 NLT**

**APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS**

Why would the “teachers of religious law” attempt such a harsh judgment against Jesus (e.g. “he only has power over evil because he is possessed by evil”)?

These religious leaders would later have Jesus executed on the basis that he was guilty of blasphemy. Claiming to be honoring God, they instead were blindly bent on protecting their political power. They wanted to force everyone ELSE to follow God, and they ignored God’s call on their lives. Rather than pointing the finger at others, take a good look at yourself: are YOU following Jesus, or are you just pressuring others to accommodate your needs?

**PRAYER SUGGESTIONS**

Lord, I am inherently selfish, self-centered, and easily triggered to blame others when I am at fault. Teach me to be humble so I can see Jesus clearly and follow him faithfully.

## DAY 2 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER (“SOAP”)

### CONVERSATION STARTER

What’s your threshold of faith—do you demand clarity and have to “prove” something before you choose to believe it, or are you comfortable with a reasonable amount of ambiguity?

### SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION

Once again Jesus began teaching by the lakeshore. A very large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat in the boat while all the people remained on the shore. He taught them by telling many stories in the form of parables, such as this one:

“Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed. As he scattered it across his field, some of the seed fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate it.

“Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seed sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plant soon wilted under the hot sun, and since it didn’t have deep roots, it died.

“Other seed fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants so they produced no grain.

“Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they sprouted, grew, and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!”

Then he said, “Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.” **Mark 4:1–9 NLT**

### APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS

What does Jesus mean by “anyone with ears to hear”?

If you were just hearing this story for the first time without any understanding of the context or application, what would your opinion of the “farmer” be?

Why do you think Jesus told stories that were simple enough to be understood and retold by children?

### PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Lord, teach me to receive your word faithfully, curiously, and humbly like a child. Help me to learn and grow. Help me to have “ears to hear”!

## DAY 3 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER (“SOAP”)

### CONVERSATION STARTER

Who is so generous to you that you respond with generosity to them? Family? Work? Friends?

### SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION

**Continued...** Later, when Jesus was alone with the twelve disciples and with the others who were gathered around, they asked him what the parables meant.

He replied, “You are permitted to understand the secret of the Kingdom of God. But I use parables for everything I say to outsiders, so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled: ‘When they see what I do, they will learn nothing. When they hear what I say, they will not understand. Otherwise, they will turn to me and be forgiven.’”

Then Jesus said to them, “If you can’t understand the meaning of this parable, how will you understand all the other parables? The farmer plants seed by taking God’s word to others. The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message, only to have Satan come at once and take it away. The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word.

“The seed that fell among the thorns represents others who hear God’s word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, so no fruit is produced. And the seed that fell on good soil represents those who hear and accept God’s word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!” **Mark 4:10–20 NLT**

### APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS

How does this parable open the way to understanding the other teachings of Jesus?

While it would be easy to judge the farmer’s aim or eyesight as inferior (why would he not simply plant in good soil only?), the context shows that God is generous with truth, even giving opportunity to those who will not receive it. Which “soil” are you?

Looking at your own heart, are there places in your heart you willingly accept Jesus’ teaching and others that are “choked out” or paved solid, not letting Jesus’ “seed” grow? For example, some let Jesus affect their friendships but not their money, or maybe they are faithful to attend worship but refuse to let anyone close. What areas of your heart need to be changed?

### PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Lord, heal my heart. Help me to faithfully receive your word, letting it grow to produce a generous harvest for you!

## DAY 4 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER (“SOAP”)

### CONVERSATION STARTER

What do you take pride in? Is that pride against God’s plan or a gift from God?

### SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul? **Matthew 16:24–26 NLT**

*The Apostle Paul, a great example of what Jesus said above, wrote:* Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. **Philippians 2:1–11 NLT**

### APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS

Why was Jesus’ baffling choice to appear as a servant and die a criminal’s death so abhorrent and offensive to everyone? Does Jesus’ willingness to sacrifice everything for others intimidate you?

Have you found that by giving up your life for Jesus, he is able to honor that sacrifice and make your life better?

Why was Jesus passionate about bringing glory to the Father?

### PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Lord, thank you for giving me a greater life than I could have on my own under my own strength, wisdom, and power. Help me be humble, thinking of others as better than myself.

## DAY 5 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER (“SOAP”)

### CONVERSATION STARTER

How do you believe God sees you? How do you believe God “feels” about you?

### SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION

Oh, foolish Galatians! Who has cast an evil spell on you? For the meaning of Jesus Christ’s death was made as clear to you as if you had seen a picture of his death on the cross. Let me ask you this one question: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law of Moses? Of course not! You received the Spirit because you believed the message you heard about Christ.

How foolish can you be? After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort? Have you experienced so much for nothing? Surely it was not in vain, was it? I ask you again, does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law? Of course not! It is because you believe the message you heard about Christ.

In the same way, “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.” The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God. What’s more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would make the Gentiles right in his sight because of their faith. God proclaimed this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, “All nations will be blessed through you.”

So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith. But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the Scriptures say, “Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the commands that are written in God’s Book of the Law.”

So it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.” **Galatians 3:1–11 NLT**

### APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS

Human nature tempts us to rely on ourselves rather than God for our protection, provision, and purpose. Have you found it difficult to trust the grace of God in your life?

How did you answer the initial question (How do you believe God sees you?)—is that based on Scriptural truth or your own thoughts/feelings?

When you feel the effects of following the “law” (feelings of success/pride/power if you succeed OR feelings of guilt/shame if you fail—BOTH of which lead to spiritual death), do you run away to your own efforts or draw close to God, relying on his grace?

### PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

Lord, help me humbly rely on your grace to build my confidence in you, establish my security in you, and to act in obedience from a place of gratitude and safety in you!