

Di121 Effective Communication

Lesson Di121-11 Method: Using Cultural Context

Culture refers to how people of a certain group solve issues of life together. How a group of people deals with their problems reveals their values. Each culture group has certain activities that have special meanings. Knowing the meanings behind their activities may help someone outside the culture communicate God's truth to them. For instance, all peoples must deal with the need for sufficient food. Obtaining a good harvest is essential to sustaining life. This lesson discusses how Jesus used a story in the familiar context of harvest to teach spiritual truth.

Jesus told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear" (Matt 13:3-9).

This 'Parable of the Sower,' as it is called, might better be called the 'Parable of the Soils.' Jesus really spoke about the response of different soils to the seed. He was teaching about which type of soil produced the best harvest. In conveying his message Jesus used a story about a common cultural event, the sowing of seed. The purpose of planting seed was to reap an abundant harvest. In this story Jesus spoke about hindrances to getting a crop and about how much could be harvested. Jesus was really talking about spiritual seed, not literal seed. What he wanted to reveal were both the difficulties and blessings of seeing a spiritual harvest.

The truths contained in the parable are secrets about the kingdom. The disciples were about to receive the meaning, because they were seeking truth. Parables were for the people who were seeking truth. If a person's heart is open, they will receive more truth.

Jesus explained to the disciples: "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." (Matt 13:18-23)

So Jesus gave them the key to unlock the meaning of the story. Using the familiar context of planting and harvest, this parable taught his listeners why he sowed the same seed everywhere. The seed is God's Word. He wanted everyone to hear it and believe on him. How

can Satan snatch truth from people? Such an event is not God's will, so he can't be the one who makes it happen. It happens when people believe other voices rather than God's truth. Cultures that reject the one true God often believe the falsehoods of Satan. Those plants represent those who initially accept the Word, but having no root, fail to become learners or disciples. Troubles or trials cause them to fall away. Those represented as being choked by the weeds of this life represent those more concerned about their needs and riches here than about eternal life. Those who hear the word and obey it stand for good soil—the open heart.

Jesus built this parable on cultural norms that were familiar to his audience. Planting and harvesting were common scenes. Some of the values of our cultures are far from the values of the kingdom of God. We can often communicate, however, using our culture to reveal the truths of the kingdom. Jesus used something valued by the culture to show believers the things that God values.

Jesus knew that all his listeners did not have the good soil of an open, seeking heart. Some believed Satan's lies; some heard but did not want to obey. Some closed their hearts, turned away, and did not want to understand. To those who were seeking, Jesus revealed more truth. He explained the spiritual meaning of the parable. Those hearers who had already closed their minds and hearts did not benefit from what they heard.

This story is **important** because it demonstrates how Jesus used ordinary parts of culture to reveal truths about God's values.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that the better we understand a culture, the better we will be at communicating God's eternal truth in that culture.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. What might be a better name for the 'parable of the sower'? [Pause]
A. If you said, "A better name might be the 'parable of the soils,' because it speaks about the response of different soils to the seed," you are correct.
2. Why did Jesus speak to the disciples in parables?" [Pause]
A. If you said, "He spoke in parables because spiritual truth was given to those whose hearts were open and seeking," you are correct.
3. What is the value of understanding both our own culture and God's kingdom? [Pause]
A. If you said that we can communicate using the values of our culture to demonstrate the spiritual values of the kingdom, you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to memorize the story and tell it to someone who has not heard it before. Then ask them this question, "What are some familiar values in our culture that could be used to illustrate spiritual truths?" Some answers might be: parent's love for children, people who care for animals, hunger for education, etc. Ask also, "What parts of our culture might keep God's word from producing a harvest in someone's heart?" Answers could include: seeking importance, money, and power over other people.