

Semicontinuous

1 Sam. 15:34–16:13

Ps. 20

Complementary

Ezek. 17:22–24

Ps. 92:1–4, 12–15

2 Cor. 5:6–10, 14–17

Mark 4:26–34

Growing God's Reign

**Goal for
the Session**

Youth will consider broadcasting seed as a metaphor for evangelism and discern ways to proclaim the kingdom.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Mark 4:26–34

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Judith Hoch Wray

Verse 28. The earth produces “of itself” (*automatē*, from which we derive “automatic”). In the OT and later Jewish texts, the term referred to that which was worked by God alone, without human effort. An ongoing theological debate among Jewish and Christian thinkers has continued from Jesus’ time until now: Does the coming of the final redemption depend on God’s will alone, or does human effort make a difference? Mark asserts that while humans are called to “sow” or to “scatter the seed,” the growth is completely up to God. The fulfillment comes in stages—first . . . , then . . . , then . . . For now, the one who scatters does not understand the process and can only wait patiently.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Wendy Farley

Our difficulty arises in confusing the way of the kingdom with our ordinary way of doing things. Jesus is calling us to a very different way of being with ourselves, with one another, with the divine, by asking us to recognize that spiritual growth and intimacy with God arises as naturally as seeds growing. The harvest will come without us having to work for it, because God adores us and it is this love that is the power of growth. It is this love that transforms the tiniest and most impotent-looking seed into a lush bush that gives rest and shade to the singing birds.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Don E. Saliers

We do well to continue pondering the inexhaustible range of meanings these stories of Jesus about the kingdom generate. The saving act of God in Jesus Christ remains both revealed and veiled to us in this life, just as it remained so for the first communities. To follow this teller of parables is to become alive to all the paradoxes and the tensions of his life and death: goodness appears in human form, and human powers are threatened; yet death leads to life. We struggle to understand while yet standing under the signs of God’s offer of life.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Nibs Stroupe

There is also an emphasis on the mystery and surprise of God. We live in an age when the mystery and surprise of all of life, including God’s power, are being squeezed out of our consciousness. This parable asks us not to close our imaginations too quickly, because there is a dynamic, vital power that is mysteriously beyond our comprehension and our grasp. In this parable, Jesus suggests that history has been made ready, just as fields are readied to be planted. The world has been made ready, and now God’s reign has burst on the stage of history in the life of Jesus.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE
Mark 4:26–34

Focus on Your Teaching

Young people are keenly aware that with digital media, almost anyone's message can have a big impact. A simple message of 140 characters or a captured image can easily go viral. Young people can resonate well with the parable of the Mustard Seed, which teaches that even a small message of faith, in God's hands, can change the world. As young people recognize the gifts of God growing and flourishing within them, they can discover how they too can broadcast the seeds of God's love into all the corners of their lives.

God, help me nurture the seeds of love in the hearts of these young people you love passionately. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- paper
- pens
- Bibles
- newsprint
- markers
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- pieces of card stock
- small seeds
- bowl
- tape

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2
- option 2: sheets of poster board (cut in half), art supplies (markers, pastels, paint and brushes), craft materials (craft foam, florist wire, beads)
- option 3: sheets of cardboard, variety of seeds, glue

For Video Connection

- Internet access

A sower is a farmer or gardener who scatters seed over the land as a way of planting a crop.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, make two columns on a sheet of newsprint, with the headings “Sower Work” and “Seed/Soil Work.”

Ask participants to form groups of three or four, if possible. Give each person a sheet of paper and a pen. Invite participants to write a short note describing something for which they have a passion. Then have them pass their notes to others in their small group. Each time a note is received, that person attempts to condense it into a shorter paragraph, sentence, or phrase. Invite participants to read the resulting messages to the whole group. Ask:

- ✿ What were some of the words and phrases that stood out for you in these messages?
- ✿ When have you received a short message or note that meant a great deal to you?

Explain that in this week's session we will discover the power little messages can have. Pray:

Loving God, we come expectantly to hear your word for us today. Amen.

EXPLORING

Explain that in this week's reading from the Gospel of Mark Jesus tells two stories, or parables, about God's kingdom. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Parables and Seeds) and read together the definition of a parable.

Explain that the first parable is about planting seeds. Read the definition of a sower in the sidebar. Then form two groups and give each group one of the sheets of newsprint (labeled Sower Work and Seed/Soil Work). Ask each group to read Mark 4:26–29 and list all of the things that either a sower does or the seeds and soil do to create a harvest. Ask:

- ✿ In the parable, how much of the effort to create a harvest belongs to the sower?
- ✿ How much of the effort belongs to the soil and seed?

Jesus uses the phrase “kingdom of God” to describe a world where people choose to live in faithful ways, God’s ways.

✠ What do you think Jesus is saying about God’s kingdom in this story about seeds?

The gospel writer records another teaching, or parable, from Jesus comparing God’s kingdom to a seed. Ask youth to look at the Action Scripture section on the resource sheet and spend a few moments thinking about what actions they could do to mime each of the bolded words or phrases. Then read Mark 4:30–32 aloud slowly, pausing for participants to mime their actions to illustrate the words used in this part of the parable.

✠ What do you think Jesus is saying about God’s kingdom, or living in God’s way, in this second parable about seeds?

Invite another volunteer to read Mark 4:33–34. Read again the definition of a parable on the resource sheet. In the area where Jesus lived mustard seeds and bushes would have been a plant people would have seen in their everyday life.

✠ Why do think that Jesus used this particular plant as a metaphor for his parable about the kingdom of God?

✠ If Jesus was living in our community, what kinds of seeds and plants might he use as a metaphor for the kingdom of God?

Jesus’ parables invite us to think about how we can sow seeds of God’s love and justice in our world and proclaim God’s kingdom, trusting that God will work with what we sow to help the kingdom grow. Invite participants to name some small seeds that they can sow that can help to break open God’s kingdom (such as offering support and affirmation to another person, speaking out against an injustice, caring for the environment).

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

- 1. Evangelism Projects** Youth will consider broadcasting seed as a metaphor for evangelism and discern ways that they can proclaim the kingdom. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Seeds of Evangelism) and invite youth to review the information. Have them form pairs to respond to the suggestions. Gather again as a group to name the plans and discuss how they, as a youth group, could work together to put one or more of the plans into action.
- 2. Parable Posters** Youth will design posters representing ways to proclaim the kingdom. Distribute pieces of poster board and invite youth to use the art and craft supplies to create small posters to illustrate the images in the parables: sowing the seeds of the gospel message and their growth (Mark 4:26–29). Have them name the gospel seed messages that they want to sow and the kind of growth that could result (for example, sowing random acts of kindness could result in creating a kinder and more civil society). Display these in the meeting space or church hall.

EASY
PREP

- 3. Seed Symbols** Youth will consider broadcasting seed as a metaphor for evangelism and create symbols representing this image. In the parables explored this week Jesus compares the kingdom of God with the mystery of growing seeds. Invite youth to use a variety of seeds to create abstract art images to represent the power of God's love to transform the tiny seeds of evangelism into the growth of God's kingdom.

CLOSING

Gather in a circle with the card stock and bowl of seeds in the middle. Say: "Jesus said the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that when sown grows up to become the greatest of shrubs." Invite youth to take turns finishing the following sentence using ideas from the discussion during the session: "The kingdom of God is like a seed of . . ." and describing something that happens when it grows (for example, "justice that grows to make the world a fairer place").

Invite youth to each take a card, tape several seeds to one side, and write a one-sentence prayer on the other side asking for God's support to sow seeds of evangelism and help God's kingdom to grow. Pray the words of the Lord's Prayer together.

■ ENHANCEMENT

VIDEO CONNECTION

Performing random acts of kindness can be compared to sowing small seeds that grow and spread in amazing ways, like the mustard seed in Jesus' parable. Spend some time viewing a video clip (see link in sidebar) documenting acts of kindness. Invite group members to talk about their own experiences of seeing seeds of kindness and affirmation grow into a powerful harvest of God's love. Discuss the following questions together:

- ✪ What do acts of kindness need to flourish and grow?
- ✪ Where have you seen signs in your community of God's kingdom flourishing and growing?

[www.youtube.com/
watch?v=uaWA2GbcnJU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaWA2GbcnJU)

Parables and Seeds

Parable comes from a Greek word that means “to put things together in order to compare them.” Parables are usually short stories that are told to teach a lesson. Jesus often used parables to describe God and how to live in God’s ways. These parables used concrete objects from everyday living (like seeds, yeast, fruit, weeds, treasure, light) to help describe abstract, hard-to-understand ideas.

Action Scripture

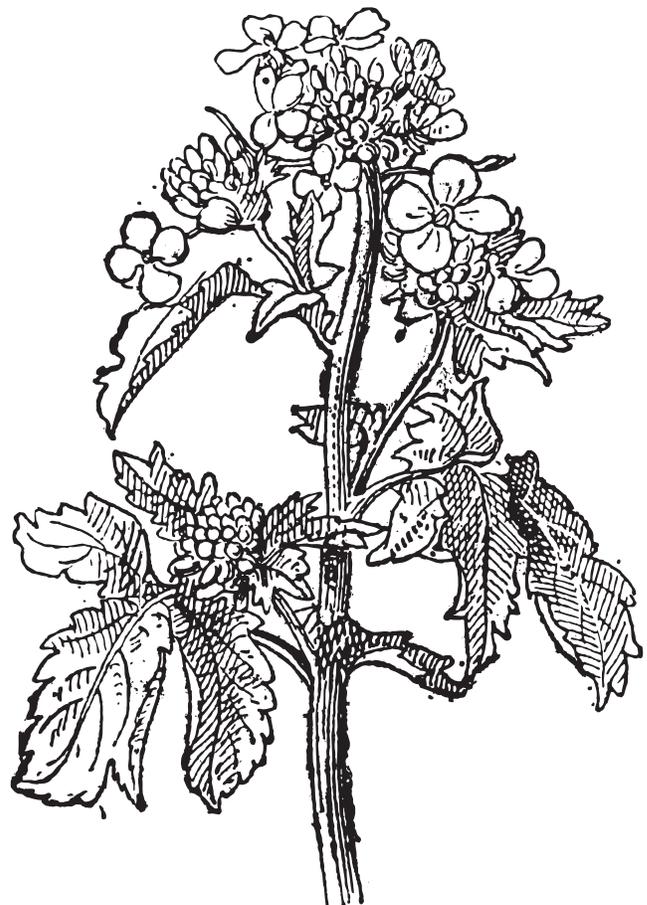
Choose an action to illustrate each bolded word or set of words:

Jesus said: **What is** God’s kingdom like? What **story** can I use to explain it? It is like what happens when a mustard **seed is planted in the ground**. It is the **smallest seed** in all **the world**. But once it is planted, it **grows larger** than any garden plant. It even puts out **branches** that are big enough for **birds to nest** in its **shade**.

Mark 4:30–32, CEV

A mustard seed is about 0.07 inches in diameter.

A mustard plant can grow to be 10 feet tall.



Seeds of Evangelism

"Be the change you wish to see happening in the world."

Mahatma Gandhi, Indian activist and spiritual leader

Jesus uses the metaphor of a seed sprouting and growing to describe spreading the good news of the kingdom of God. Making a difference in the world sometimes begins with a small idea (a "seed thought") that when planted can sprout and grow into something big and amazing (like a mustard bush). Jesus tells us that our job is to scatter the seeds of making the world a better place and working with God to make these seeds grow and thrive.

Here are some steps you can follow to plant the seeds of living in God's way and be the change that can make a difference in the world:

- Make a list of things that concern you about the world, things that are not in line with God's kingdom.

- Choose one of these concerns and decide on one "seed" of love or action that could be planted to respond to this concern; give your "seed" a name.

- Make a list of things young people could do that would help this seed to grow:
What materials or resources would be needed?

What actions would be needed?

What could others in the church do to help?

