

Responding to God's Word

Mark 4:1-20

Small Group Notes

INTRODUCTION

In Mark 4:1-20, Jesus speaks to the crowds by the sea using a powerful metaphor that the people would understand. Jesus challenges the people to listen, but only a few stay and ask Jesus to share more and apply the parable to their lives. They become a model of what it means to listen to God. Listening to God has more to do with the posture of our hearts, than with our ears. All the people that day heard Jesus teach, but only a few with humble hearts responded to Jesus and received his truth into their lives.

Opening Question: This Sunday Pastor Mark shared from his heart that we must take time this year to consider who we are listening to. There are three main options: listening to self, listening to others, and listening to God.

Which do you find yourself listening to the most? Which voice do you want to treasure the most this year?

Main Idea: *Listening to God involves responding to his call and staying close to Jesus.*

Read: Mark 4:1-20

TROUBLE IN THE TEXT

At first glance, in 4:11-12 Jesus seems to be intentionally excluding others. A closer look points us to Isaiah 6:9-10. In quoting these verses Jesus is linking his teaching with the context of Isaiah. God sends his faithful prophet to a faithless people who will not listen. In the same way, God sends his faithful Son and a majority of the people will not receive his word. In spite of this, the sower sows the word to all kinds of soil,

even the hardened hearts. Parables reveal the hearts of those who stand opposed to the word of God, but to those with humble and receptive hearts, they receive the kingdom truths with joy. Most people could not understand or receive Isaiah's word from the Lord until after facing destruction from the Assyrians and later the Babylonians. In a similar way, most will not be able to understand the teachings of Jesus until after his death and resurrection.

Sometimes we are unable to really listen to God until we face the destruction of something in our lives. While God does not ultimately cause the hard times in our lives, he uses those times to make our hearts good soil to receptively receive the word and grow abundantly.

Question: *Talk as a group about a time that God used a hard time in your life to draw you closer to him.*

DIG AND DISCOVER

Jesus teaches that there are four main responses to the word of God, represented by four kinds of soil. It is important to see that we can on any given day or moment be any one of these kinds of soil. It takes commitment and prayerful intentionality to tend regularly to the soil of our hearts, so that we can be good soil where the word takes root, grows, and bears much fruit.

Read Jesus's application of the parable in Mark 4:13-20. Discuss the ways that we become the three kinds of poor soil and then discuss how we can position our hearts to be good soil that responds to Jesus call and stays close to him.

CLOSING

Is there any specific way that God is speaking to you through His word this week? How can we pray for each other this week? Is there a small step of obedience that you would like to take?