YOUTH GROUP CURRICULUM · AGES 11–18

THE PARABLES



WEEK 1 OF 6

The Sower

Theme: Hearing and growing · Main text: Luke 8:4–15

STORIES JESUS TOLD.

Small stories. Big truth.

Inside: 45 / 60 / 75-minute plans · word-for-word scripts · 4 game options · response activity · Joys & Concerns · 3 student pages

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NEXT GENERATION MINISTRY TOGETHER

WEEK 1 · LEADER GUIDE

The Sower

Theme: Hearing and growing · Main text: Luke 8:4–15 · Memory verse: Luke 8:15

THE BIG IDEA

The same seed lands on different soil. Jesus invites us to be good soil: hearing, holding on, and growing over time.

The question to carry all night

"Where am I in this story?"

By the end, students will…

- Retell the parable of the sower and what the four soils mean
- Honestly notice what kind of soil they've been lately, with zero shame
- Fill in their first Story Card and pick one step to "hold on tightly"

NIGHT AT A GLANCE · PICK YOUR LENGTH

SEGMENT	WHAT HAPPENS	45 MIN	60 MIN	75 MIN
Welcome	Greet new students by name and grade; your announcements	—	—	5
Game 1	Pick from the Activity Menu (next page)	8	10	10
Game 2	A second game from the menu (optional)	—	—	10
Hook + Message	"One Seed" · Act It Out · Luke 8:4–15	10	12	12
Response Activity	The Soil Check + Story Card #1 + My One Step	10	12	12
Small Group Talk	Pick 3–4 questions	—	8	10
Joys & Concerns	"I lift up ___ to God." / "Lord, hear our prayer."	10	10	10
Pastoral Prayer	Leader prays over what was shared + send-off	5	5	5

Supplies

- Story Cards: copy the card on student page 2 onto cardstock
- A small packet of seeds (any kind) for the hook
- Index cards, pens, scissors
- Game extras: Seed Cards and Weeds or Water cards (see menu)
- Student pages (last 3 pages) · Bibles · phone timer

Before students arrive

- Choose your games using the Activity Menu
- Read Luke 8:4–18 and Mark 4:26–29
- Practice the Act It Out narration out loud once
- Think of one time something good someone told you actually stuck
- Pray for each student by name, especially anyone who feels far from God

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CHOOSE WHAT FITS YOUR GROUP

Activity Menu

Every group is different. Some nights you have fifteen students bouncing off the walls; some nights you have four quiet ones and a visitor. This week two of the games are acting games, and they work best in groups, with volunteers only. Nobody ever has to perform alone. Pick one or two games, then finish with the response activity. Every game ends with a debrief that points back to tonight's question.

ACTIVITY	ENERGY	PREP	BEST WHEN…	MIN
A. Four Soils Freeze Frame Groups strike frozen pictures, then talk about the scene	High	None	Students need to move; you want a fast, silly start	10
B. Same Seed Skits One piece of advice lands on four people: act it out	Medium	Seed Cards, 5 min	You want laughs and the strongest link to the message	10–12
C. Seed Packet Mingle Swap "what I'm growing at" cards and stories	Medium	Index cards, pens	Lots of new students; everyone needs to meet everyone	8–10
D. Weeds or Water? Trios sort everyday things and tell real stories	Low	Cards, 5 min	Small or quiet group; older students who like to talk	8–10
E. The Soil Check Response activity (after message)	Reflective	Story Cards, pens	Every night: this is the heart of the week and starts the Story Cards	12

SUGGESTED COMBINATIONS

Big, high-energy group (10–15)

A. Four Soils Freeze Frame → B. Same Seed Skits → Message → E. The Soil Check

Small group (4–6)

D. Weeds or Water? (whole group) → Message → E. The Soil Check in a circle

Lots of first-time visitors

C. Seed Packet Mingle → A. Four Soils Freeze Frame → Message → E. The Soil Check (low-pressure option)

Short on time (45 min)

B. Same Seed Skits → Message → E. The Soil Check → Joys & Concerns

GROUND RULES FOR EVERY GAME *Nobody is forced to share or to act. Nobody is the punchline. New students get paired with a regular. Acting is always in groups, never solo. If a game ever starts to single someone out, change the round and keep moving.*

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A. Four Soils Freeze Frame

10 min · High energy

Purpose: A fast tableau game. Small groups get ten seconds to build a frozen picture of whatever the leader calls out, like a photo of a scene. After each frame, groups unfreeze and answer a quick talk question about their own lives. The last four rounds are the four soils from tonight's story, so students have already "seen" the parable before they hear it.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Split into groups of 3–5. Mix it up: "Find people you haven't talked to yet tonight."
2. The leader calls out a scene and counts down from ten. Groups build a frozen picture together, using everyone in the group. No talking, no props, no touching needed.
3. At "Freeze!" the leader walks the "gallery" and gives each frame a fun title ("I'm calling this one *Monday Morning*").
4. Unfreeze. Each group answers the **talk question** for that scene (about 45 seconds). Everyone answers, or passes.
5. Play 6–8 fun rounds, then finish with the four soil rounds in order: the road, the rock, the thorns, the good ground.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "This is Freeze Frame. I'm going to call out a scene. Your group has ten seconds to make a frozen picture of it, like somebody hit pause on a movie. Everybody in your group is in the picture. You don't have to say anything, you just have to freeze. Then I'll come admire your art. Ready? First scene: *the last day of school.* Ten, nine, eight…"
>
> "Freeze! Beautiful. Okay, unfreeze. In your group: what's the best last day of school you can remember?"

SCENES + TALK QUESTIONS

SCENE TO FREEZE	TALK QUESTION (AFTER UNFREEZING)
The last day of school	"Best last day of school you remember?"
Your family on a Saturday morning	"Early riser or sleep till noon?"
A team that just won the championship	"Biggest win you've ever been part of?"
Your phone at 1% battery	"What's the first app you'd save the battery for?"
A garden after a huge rainstorm	"Have you ever grown anything? How did it go?"
Birds fighting over one french fry	"What's a food you would fight a bird for?"
The world's slowest-growing plant	"What's something you're waiting for right now?"
Thanksgiving dinner, one minute in	"Favorite holiday food?"
Soil round 1: A seed on a busy road	"Where do you feel most rushed in your week?"

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Soil round 2: A plant growing on a rock in the hot sun	"Something you got really into, then dropped?"
Soil round 3: A plant stuck in a patch of thorns	"What fills up your schedule the most?"
Soil round 4: A huge, healthy plant in good ground	"Something you've gotten better at over time?"

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Play as one group. Take turns being the "photographer" who calls the scene and gives the title, and answer the talk question all together.
- **Slow-motion unfreeze:** For the soil rounds, groups unfreeze in slow motion to show what happens next to the seed.
- **Guess the frame:** One group freezes a scene from a card while the other groups guess what it is.

LEADER NOTE *Keep the countdown short and the titles kind. If a student would rather not be in the picture, give them the job of "photographer" or "museum guide" for their group. That still counts as playing.*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
>
> "Those last four pictures weren't random. They're the four places a seed lands in one of the most famous stories Jesus ever told. For the next six weeks we're doing a series called Stories Jesus Told, and every week we'll ask one question: **where am I in this story?**"

B. Same Seed Skits

10–12 min · Medium energy

Purpose: Groups get one "seed": a piece of good advice. They act out a short skit where the same advice lands on four different people with four different results. It's funny, it's fast, and it sets up the message perfectly: in Jesus' story, the seed is the same every time. The difference is where it lands.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Split into groups of 4–5. Each group draws a **Seed Card** (see the list below).
2. Groups have 4 minutes to plan a 60-second skit: one person gives the advice, then show how it lands on four people. **Doesn't hear it** (earbuds in) · **Super excited, quits fast** · **Too busy** · **Actually does it, and slowly gets better**.
3. Every role is a volunteer. Students who'd rather not act can be the narrator, the sound effects, or the "time passing" sign holder.
4. Groups perform. Everyone claps for every group, no rankings.
5. After each skit, the whole room answers the group's **talk question** with the person next to them.

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LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
> "Each group gets a Seed Card. On it is a piece of good advice. Your job is to make a one-minute skit where somebody gives that advice to four different people. Person one doesn't even hear it, earbuds in. Person two is super excited about it… for one day. Person three would love to, but is way too busy. And person four actually does it, and gets better, slowly. Don't want to act? Be the narrator or the sound effects. Four minutes to plan. Go!"

SEED CARDS + TALK QUESTIONS

SEED CARD (THE ADVICE)	TALK QUESTION (AFTER THE SKIT)
"Practice your free throws ten minutes a day."	"What's something you practice a lot?"
"Drink more water."	"What's one healthy habit you actually have?"
"Start your project before the night it's due."	"Planner or last-minute person?"
"Be kind to the new kid."	"Who was kind to you when you were new somewhere?"
"Go to bed before midnight."	"What time do you really fall asleep?"
"Read the instructions first."	"Instructions person or figure-it-out person?"
"Learn to cook one real meal."	"What's the best thing you can make?"
"Call your grandma."	"Who's someone older who's always glad to hear from you?"
"Put your phone in another room while you do homework."	"Where do you focus best?"
"Take one minute to pray before your day starts."	"What's the first thing you do every morning?"

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Make one skit together with the leader as the narrator. Or skip acting and go around the circle: "Which of the four people are you, usually, with this advice?"
- **Speed round:** No planning time. The leader reads a Seed Card and four volunteers act the four reactions on the spot, in 20 seconds.
- **Student Seed Cards:** Groups write their own piece of good advice, then trade with another group.

LEADER NOTE *Make sure the "doesn't hear it" and "too busy" characters are played for laughs, never as a real student in the room. If a skit starts mocking a voice, an accent, or a type of person, pause and redirect: "Let's make the joke about the situation, not the person."*

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DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
> "Same advice every time. Totally different results. Did you notice it was never the advice that changed? It was the person it landed on. Jesus told a story about exactly that, and tonight we're going to act it out. Keep this question in your head: **where am I in this story?**"

C. Seed Packet Mingle

8–10 min · Medium energy

Purpose: Every student makes a "seed packet" on an index card about something they're growing at right now: a skill, a hobby, a sport, an instrument. Then everyone mingles, swaps stories, and trades packets. It's easy for new students because the card gives them something to talk about, and everyone learns something real about each other.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Everyone gets an index card. On top, write your first name. Then write: "**I'm growing at ___**" and "**I started ___ ago.**" Draw a little sprout if you want.
2. Everyone stands and finds a partner. Read each other's cards, then answer the **Mingle Question** the leader calls out.
3. After about 45 seconds, the leader calls "Trade!" Partners swap cards and find someone new.
4. Now you're holding someone else's packet. Introduce that person to your new partner ("This is Jordan's. Jordan is growing at guitar..."), then answer the new Mingle Question.
5. Play 6–8 rounds. At the end, everyone finds the owner of the card they're holding and gives it back.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
> "Grab a card. This is your seed packet. Write your name, then 'I'm growing at,' and something you're getting better at right now. Soccer, drawing, baking, a language, a video game, anything. Then write how long ago you started. I'll go first: 'I'm growing at running. I started three months ago.' Now find a partner, read each other's packets, and answer this: *What's something that took you forever to learn?*"

MINGLE QUESTIONS (ONE PER ROUND)

- What's something that took you forever to learn?
- Who taught you the thing on your card?
- What's the hardest part about getting better at it?
- Something you quit and kind of wish you hadn't?
- Best advice anyone has ever given you?
- What's something you're really patient about?
- What's something you're really impatient about?
- If you could be instantly great at one thing, what?
- What's a plant, pet, or project you've kept alive?
- What does "getting better" look like for you this year?

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Sit in a circle. Pass the cards to the left each round, and the person holding a card introduces its owner to the group.

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- **Seed swap bonus:** If you have real seeds, tape one to each card. Students take their packet home.
- **Leaders play too:** Make a card yourself. Students love hearing what adults are still learning.

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
> "Look at how long some of you have been growing at the thing on your card. Months. Years. Nobody gets good at guitar in one night. Growing takes time, and it takes holding on. Tonight Jesus tells a story about seeds and growing, and the question is: **where am I in this story?**"

D. Weeds or Water?

8–10 min · Low energy

Purpose: A calm, story-based game for small or quiet groups. Trios get cards with everyday things on them and decide together: is this usually a **weed** (it crowds out what matters) or **water** (it helps me grow)? The fun is that most cards are "it depends," so students end up telling real stories about their lives.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Split into trios. Each trio gets a stack of 6–8 cards (see the list below) and makes two piles: **Weeds** and **Water**.
2. Take turns flipping a card. The person who flips it says where they think it goes and gives one real reason from their life ("Group chats are weeds for me, because I check them during homework").
3. The other two can agree or argue for the other pile, with their own examples. Then the trio decides.
4. If a card really is both, make a third pile: **It Depends**.
5. Each trio shares one card they argued about most, and how they decided.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
> "Get in groups of three. Every card has something from normal life on it. Your trio decides: is it a weed, something that crowds out good stuff, or is it water, something that helps you grow? But you have to give a real reason from your life. You're allowed to disagree. Honestly, a lot of these are going to be 'it depends.' I'll go first: 'Coffee. Water. Definitely water.'"

WEEDS OR WATER CARDS

- My phone at bedtime
- A group chat
- Sleep
- A really busy sports schedule
- A friend who checks on me
- Worrying about grades
- Music in my headphones
- Video games
- A grandparent or older friend
- Saying yes to everything
- A quiet walk outside
- Shopping for new stuff

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VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Play as one group. The leader flips each card, and everyone points left (weeds) or right (water) on three, then explains.
- **Lightning round:** No piles. The leader reads a card and students just call out "Weed!" or "Water!" and one person tells why.

LEADER NOTE *Keep "Shopping for new stuff" light and never compare what students own or what their families can afford. If a card stirs up something heavy (worry, stress at home), thank the student and follow up privately (see the Care Note).*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
>
> "Some of these were weeds for some of you and water for others. Jesus actually talks about weeds, or thorns, in tonight's story. He names worries, money, and fun stuff that can slowly crowd out what matters. Keep tonight's question in your head: **where am I in this story?**"

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Hook: "One Seed"

2 min

SAY

(Hold up one seed between two fingers.) "Can everybody see this? Probably not. It's a seed. It's tiny. But this one little thing has a whole plant packed inside it. Roots, leaves, flowers, fruit. Everything it needs is already in there."

"So here's my question. If I give this exact seed to three different people, will it grow the same for all three?" *(Let students answer.)* "Right. It depends. Where does it get planted? Does it get water? Does somebody pull the weeds?"

"Jesus told a lot of stories. Short ones, about farmers and sheep and money and parties. For the next six weeks we're doing a series called **Stories Jesus Told**: small stories, big truth. And every week we'll ask one question: **where am I in this story?**"

Message: Same Seed, Different Soil

10 min

1. Act it out: one farmer, a lot of seed

SAY (CAST IT)

"I need some volunteers. Nobody has lines. You just have to move. I need four seeds, two or three birds, one sun, and two or three thorns. I'll be the farmer." *(Volunteers only. With a small group, students can play two parts, or everyone plays the seeds.)*

Act It Out · Cast and Cues

ROLE	WHAT THEY DO WHILE YOU NARRATE
Farmer (leader)	Tosses invisible seed everywhere and narrates
Seeds (4)	Crouch in four spots. Seed 1 rolls away, seed 2 pops up and wilts, seed 3 shrinks, seed 4 grows tall
Birds (2–3)	Flap over and "peck" at seed 1
Sun (1)	Spreads arms wide over seed 2
Thorns (2–3)	Step in close around seed 3 (no touching)

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NARRATE (ACTORS MOVE ON THE CUES)

"A farmer went out to plant his seed. And this farmer was not careful. He threw seed everywhere." (Farmer tosses invisible seed; seeds crouch in four spots.)

"Some seed landed on the road. People walked right over it. And the birds swooped in and ate it." (Birds flap over and "peck"; seed 1 rolls away and sits out.)

"Some seed landed on rock. It popped up fast, so excited! But the sun came out, and it had no water, and it dried up." (Seed 2 jumps up big, sun spreads arms, seed 2 slowly wilts.)

"Some seed landed in the thorns. It started to grow, but the thorns grew right along with it and crowded it out." (Thorns step in close around seed 3, no touching; seed 3 shrinks.)

"And some seed landed in good ground. It grew. And grew. And grew. And made a hundred times more than what was planted." (Seed 4 grows slowly to full height, arms wide. Big applause for the cast.)

"Thank you, actors. Now here's how Jesus told it. Listen for the four places the seed lands."

4 *When a great multitude came together and people from every city were coming to him, he*
spoke by a parable: 5 *"The farmer went out to sow his seed. As he sowed, some fell along the*
road, and it was trampled under foot, and the birds of the sky devoured it. 6 *Other seed fell*
on the rock, and as soon as it grew, it withered away, because it had no moisture. 7 *Other fell*
amid the thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. 8 *Other fell into the good ground*
and grew and produced one hundred times as much fruit." As he said these things, he called
out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

LUKE 8:4–8 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

2. The seed is the same. The soil is different.

SAY

"Jesus' friends didn't get it either. They asked him, 'What does this mean?' So Jesus explained it. Here's the key: the seed is God's word, everything God says to us. Listen to what each soil is."

11 *"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.* 12 *Those along the road are those who*
hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, that they may not
believe and be saved. 13 *Those on the rock are they who, when they hear, receive the word*
with joy; but these have no root. They believe for a while, then fall away in time of
temptation. 14 *What fell among the thorns, these are those who have heard, and as they go on*
their way they are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life; and they bring no fruit to
maturity."

LUKE 8:11–14 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

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"So the **road** is a heart that's hard and in a hurry. It hears, but it's gone in two seconds. The **rock** is the person who gets super excited at camp, and by Tuesday it's gone, because there were no roots. The **thorns** are a life so full of worries and stuff and fun things that there's no room left for God to grow anything."

"And here's the honest part. Most of us have been all four. Some weeks I'm the road. Some weeks I'm full of thorns. That's not a reason to feel bad. It's a reason to ask the question: **where am I in this story?**"

LEADER NOTE *If you have a short, honest story about a time something good someone told you (a coach, a parent, a verse, a sermon) actually stuck and grew in you over time, tell it here. Or a time it didn't. Thirty seconds is plenty. Students trust leaders who go first.*

3. Good soil hears, holds on, and grows slowly

SAY

"Then Jesus describes the good soil. This is our memory verse."

> *Those in the good ground, these are those who with an honest and good heart, having heard the word, hold it tightly, and produce fruit with perseverance.*
>
> LUKE 8:15 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

"Three things. Good soil **hears**: it actually listens. Good soil **holds it tightly**: it doesn't let the birds steal it or the weeds choke it. And good soil grows **with perseverance**. That's a fancy word for 'it keeps going, even when it's slow.' Nobody grows a hundred times overnight. Real growing is slow. And notice: it starts with 'an honest heart.' Not a perfect heart. An honest one."

4. Soil can change, and the farmer keeps sowing

SAY

"Did you notice how the farmer acts? He throws seed *everywhere*. On the road. On rocks. In the thorns. No real farmer does that. But God does. God keeps speaking to all of us, even when we're hard ground. And the good news about soil is that it can change. Hard ground can be broken up. Rocks can be moved. Weeds can be pulled."

"You're not stuck being one kind of soil forever. Tonight isn't about feeling bad about your soil. It's about being honest and asking God to help you hold on to what he says. So here's the question, and I want you to really think about it: **where am I in this story?**"

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E. Response Activity: The Soil Check

12 min

Purpose: Help students look honestly, privately, and without shame at what kind of soil they've been lately, pick one weed to pull, and pray for each other. Tonight they also start the **Story Cards**: every week of the series, each student fills in a small card with a one-sentence modern retelling of the story and where they see themselves in it. They keep all six.

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Hold up a Story Card. Explain it: one card each week, a new story each time. Keep them in a Bible, a phone case, or a wallet.
2. **My Soil Check:** On student page 1, students privately mark how much each soil sounds like them lately (Not really / Sometimes / A lot). Nobody shares their answers.
3. Students write **one weed** they want to pull this week: one thing crowding God out.
4. **Hold On Prayers:** In pairs, each partner shares one thing (only what they want to share). The other prays one sentence: "God, help ___ hold on to you this week." Then switch.
5. **Story Card #1:** Students cut out the card on page 2 (or use a cardstock copy) and fill in "This story is like when ___" and "Where I am in this story: ___."
6. **My One Step:** Students fill in "My One Step This Week" on their student page.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY (STORY CARDS)**
>
> "This is your Story Card. Every week of this series you'll get a new one, for a new story Jesus told. By the end you'll have six. Each card asks two things. One: retell the story like it happened today, in one sentence. Two: where am I in this story?"
>
> **SAY (SOIL CHECK)**
>
> "On your first page, find the Soil Check. For each soil, mark how much it sounds like you lately. Not really, sometimes, or a lot. This is just between you and God. Nobody is going to see it. And remember, everybody's been all four. Then write down one weed you'd like to pull this week."
>
> **SAY (HOLD ON PRAYERS)**
>
> "Now find a partner. Share one thing, only if you want to. Then your partner prays one sentence for you: 'God, help Jordan hold on to you this week.' That's it. One sentence. It might feel awkward. Do it anyway."
>
> **SAY (STORY CARD + ONE STEP)**
>
> "Now grab your Story Card. Finish this: 'This story is like when…' Make it today. Like, 'This story is like when a coach gives the whole team the same advice and only some people use it.' Then: 'Where I am in this story.' Last thing: write one small step on your page. Keep it tiny. Like: 'Every night before bed, I'll read Luke 8:15 and put my phone in another room.'"

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"This story is like when..." (if stuck)

- A teacher says the same thing to the whole class
- Everyone hears the coach, but only some practice
- You start a new habit, then life gets busy
- A friend's good advice actually sticks

"Hold on tightly" step ideas

- Read Luke 8:15 every morning
- Put my phone in another room for 10 minutes and read one verse
- Pull one weed: skip one thing that crowds God out
- Text my prayer partner one line on Monday
- Thank God for one thing at bedtime

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Sit in a circle. Each person prays one sentence for the person on their left, all the way around.
- **Low-pressure option:** Skip the pairs. Students write their weed on the back of their Story Card, and the leader prays one prayer over everyone: "God, help each of us hold on to you this week."
- **Real seeds:** Give each student a seed to tape to the back of their Story Card as a reminder that growing takes time.

LEADER NOTE *Never collect or look at student pages, and don't ask anyone which soil they marked. If a student says, "I'm just bad soil," gently push back: "Soil can change. That's the good news." Bring extra Story Cards for students who show up next week. If someone seems deeply discouraged or far from God, check in quietly afterward (see the Care Note).*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
>
> "Look at that card. It's small, but it's a reminder: God keeps throwing seed, even on our hard days. Your job isn't to be perfect soil. It's to be honest, hold on, and keep growing. **Where am I in this story?** Wherever you are tonight, God is still sowing. And somebody in this room just prayed for you."

Small Group Talk

8–10 min · Optional

Groups of 3–5, with one adult or student leader per group if possible. Pick 3–4 questions that fit your group.

WARM UP

1. Have you ever grown anything, like a plant, a garden, or even a science project bean?
   Follow-up: Did it survive?
2. What's the best advice someone gave you that you actually followed?
   Keep it light. It's a warm-up.

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GO DEEPER

3. Which of the four soils do you think is most common for people your age?
   Why that one?
4. Jesus says the thorns are "cares, riches, and pleasures of life." Which of those three crowds things out the most in your week?
   What does that look like?
5. The rocky soil was super excited at first, then dried up. Have you ever felt close to God at a camp or retreat, and then it faded? What would roots look like?
6. Luke 8:15 says good soil starts with "an honest and good heart." Why do you think honesty comes first?

TAKE IT HOME

7. What's one weed you could pull this week to make more room for God?
8. If you could hold on tightly to one thing God says, what would it be?

LEADER NOTE *Silence is okay. Count to seven in your head before rephrasing. If no one answers, answer it yourself briefly and honestly, then ask again.*

Joys & Concerns

10 min

Purpose: Students practice praying *for each other*, not just hearing about prayer. It's often the moment new students realize this group actually cares about them. Tonight it fits the theme: when we pray for each other, we're like water and sunshine for each other's growing.

HOW IT WORKS

1. Sit in a circle if you can. Explain the response: when someone shares, they end with "**I lift up ___ to God.**" Everyone responds together: "**Lord, hear our prayer.**"
2. Start with **joys** (things to thank God for), then move to **concerns** (things we're worried about or carrying).
3. The leader goes first to model it, with one joy and one concern.
4. Anyone can share, or pass. "Unspoken" requests are welcome, too.
5. Jot down what's shared (first names only) so you can pray for each one in the Pastoral Prayer.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "Jesus called some of our thorns 'cares,' the worries we carry around. Let's hand some to God together. What's something good you're thankful for? Or something you're worried about, for you, your family, or a friend?"
>
> "When you share, end with 'I lift up ___ to God.' And all of us will say together, 'Lord, hear our prayer.' Let's practice. I lift up this group to God…" (*All: "Lord, hear our prayer."*)
>
> "I'll go first. My joy is ___. I lift up ___ to God. My concern is ___. I lift up ___ to God."

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Joy starters (if students are stuck)

- Something I've been working at finally clicked
- A good grade, game, or performance
- Time with a friend or family member
- Someone I love got good news

Concern starters

- A test, a tryout, or a busy week
- A grandparent or relative who is sick
- A friend who's going through something
- "I have an unspoken request."

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Go around the circle so everyone gets a turn, and everyone is allowed to pass.
- **Big group (12+):** "Popcorn" style: anyone shares when ready. Cap it at about 8 minutes.
- **Written version:** Students write joys and concerns on slips of paper. The leader reads them (no names) and the group responds.

LEADER NOTE *Say once at the start: "What's shared here stays here, unless someone's safety is at risk." If a student shares something serious, thank them, pray, and follow up privately afterward (see the Care Note).*

Pastoral Prayer

3–5 min

Pray this over the group. The **[bracketed]** lines are where you name the joys and concerns students just shared.

God who keeps on sowing,

Thank you for every person in this room, especially anyone who walked in here for the very first time tonight.

Thank you for the good things growing in our lives this week. *[Name the joys shared: "Thank you for Maya's big game, for Chris's grandma getting better..."]* Every good gift comes from you.

And we bring you the worries we're carrying. *[Name the concerns: "Be with Ethan before his test. Give Sophia's family peace this week..."]* And for the things that stayed in our hearts tonight and weren't spoken out loud, you already know them. Hold them too.

You throw your seed everywhere, even on hard ground. Thank you that you never stop speaking to us. Some of us feel like the road tonight: rushed, hard, distracted. Some of us feel like the rock, and our excitement about you fades fast. Some of us are crowded with worries and stuff and busy schedules. Give us honest hearts. Help us hear you, hold on tightly, and keep growing, even when it's slow.

For anyone who is new here, thank you for bringing them. Help them feel at home. And help each of us pull one weed this week and make a little more room for you.

In Jesus' name, amen.

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SEND-OFF

"Take your student pages home: a five-day devotional and a tracker for your one step. Keep that Story Card where you'll see it. That's card number one. Next time Jesus tells a story about a man hurt on the side of the road: '**The Good Samaritan.**' And every week we'll keep asking: **where am I in this story?** See you then."

Next Week Follow-Up: Open Week 2 by saying, "If you were here last week, look at your One Step tracker. How many days did you hold on? What helped? What weeds got in the way?" Celebrate any progress, even one day. Then: "Who still has their Story Card? Hold it up." Have extra Week 1 Story Cards ready for new students so they can start their set.

Care Note for Leaders

A story about "bad soil" can land hard. Watch for a student who says they're "just bad" or "too far gone," feels far from God or hopeless, or whose "thorns" are heavy: stress at home, family money worries, grief, or something unsafe.

- **Stay calm and thank them** for telling you. Soil can change, and God keeps sowing. Never shame a student for doubts or for having little.
- **Any disclosure of abuse** means following mandatory reporting law and your church's safety policy. **Don't promise to keep secrets** if someone's safety is at risk.
- **Tell your lead pastor** the same day. **Connect them to trained help:** parents or guardians as your policy directs, a school counselor or a licensed counselor. In the U.S., anyone can call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) any time.

You're not expected to be a counselor. Your job is to listen well, take it seriously, and make sure they're connected to the right people.

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THE FULL SERIES

STORIES JESUS TOLD · 6 Weeks

Each week stands alone, so new students can jump in any week. Taught in order, the six weeks explore stories Jesus told: the sower, the good Samaritan, the lost sheep and coin, the unforgiving servant, the rich fool, and the talents. Every week students act a story out and look for themselves in it. The question every week: *Where am I in this story?*

#	WEEK	TEXT
1	**The Sower** Hearing and growing	Luke 8:4–15
2	**The Good Samaritan** Who is my neighbor?	Luke 10:25–37
3	**Lost and Found** God searches for the lost	Luke 15:1–10
4	**The Unforgiving Servant** Forgiven to forgive	Matthew 18:21–35
5	**The Rich Fool** What really matters	Luke 12:13–21
6	**Don't Bury It** Using what God gave me	Matthew 25:14–30

Every week includes

- 45 / 60 / 75-minute schedules
- Activity Menu with 4+ game options
- Word-for-word leader scripts
- Scripture (World English Bible) and one big idea
- Response activity + "One Step" challenge
- An Act It Out moment and a new Story Card every week
- Tiered discussion questions
- Joys & Concerns prayer time
- Pastoral prayer with space for your group
- Student pages and 5-day devotional
- Next-week follow-up

Built for real youth groups

These weeks are written for a real Wednesday night group: 5 to 15 students, often with a new face or two, led by a pastor or volunteer with limited prep time. Games never single anyone out, and acting is always volunteers only. Every activity has a small-group version. And every leader script can be read word for word when you're short on time.

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Purchasers may photocopy and share the student pages and leader guide for use within their own church or ministry.
Scripture quotations are from the World English Bible (public domain).

Name: _____ Date: _____

TONIGHT'S BIG IDEA

The same seed lands on different soil. Jesus invites me to be good soil: hearing, holding on, and growing over time.

THE STORY · LUKE 8:5–8, 11

"The farmer went out to sow his _____." Some fell along the _____, some on the _____, some amid the _____, and some into the good _____. "The seed is the _____ of God."

MY SOIL CHECK

Private, just you and God. Everybody has been all four. For each soil, circle how much it sounds like you lately. No wrong answers.

THE SOIL (LUKE 8:12–15)	WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE	LATELY THIS SOUNDS LIKE ME
The road · hard and hurried	I hear about God, but it's gone by the time I get to the car.	Not really · Sometimes · A lot
The rock · no roots	I get excited about God, then it fades when things get hard.	Not really · Sometimes · A lot
The thorns · crowded out	Worries, stuff, and busy plans leave no room for God.	Not really · Sometimes · A lot
Good ground · hear, hold, grow	I'm listening, holding on, and slowly growing.	Not really · Sometimes · A lot

One weed I want to pull this week:

HOLD IT TIGHTLY · LUKE 8:15

"Those in the good ground, these are those who with an _____ and good heart, having heard the word, _____ it tightly, and produce fruit with _____."

Soil can change. One thing God said that I want to hold on to:

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My One Step

MY ONE STEP THIS WEEK

Every _____ (morning / after school / lunch / bedtime)

I will hold on to God's word by _____

Example: "Every night before bed, I will read Luke 8:15 and put my phone in another room for ten minutes."

My Story Card · Week 1

This story is like when

_____

Draft it here, then copy it onto your card below and add where you are in the story.

Weed Watch (only you see this)

One weed crowding God out: _____

One way I'll make room this week: _____

MY WEEK TRACKER

Check each day you did your step.

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

MY PRAYER LIST

Write down the joys and concerns people shared tonight (first names only) and keep praying this week.

JOYS: THANK YOU, GOD, FOR…	CONCERNS: PLEASE BE WITH…

MY STORY CARD · WEEK 1

✂ Cut out along the dashed line. Keep it with your other Story Cards in your Bible, wallet, or phone case. New this week? Start your collection here.

STORIES JESUS TOLD · WEEK 1

The Sower

"Those in the good ground, these are those who with an honest and good heart, having heard the word, hold it tightly, and produce fruit with perseverance."

LUKE 8:15

This story is like when

WEEK 1

_____

_____

Where I am in this story:

_____

_____

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5 Days in the Garden

TAKE-HOME DEVOTIONAL · 5 MINUTES A DAY

Each day: read the verse, think about the question, write one honest sentence. That's it.

DAY 1 Luke 8:5 · The hard road

Some seed got trampled and snatched away before it could grow. When is your day so rushed that nothing from God sinks in? Tell God about it.

DAY 2 Luke 8:13 · No roots

The rocky soil was excited, then faded. What's one small thing that could help your faith grow roots this week?

DAY 3 Luke 8:14 · Choked out

Cares, riches, and pleasures can crowd God out. Which one takes up the most room in your life right now?

DAY 4 Luke 8:15 · Hold it tightly

Good soil starts with "an honest and good heart." What's one honest thing you want to say to God today?

DAY 5 Mark 4:27–28 · First the blade

The seed grows "first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain." Where have you grown a little, even slowly, this year?

A prayer you can pray this week

God, thank you for never giving up on sowing in my life. Break up the hard ground. Give me roots. Pull out the weeds that crowd you out. Give me an honest heart, help me hold on to what you say, and help me keep growing, even when it's slow. Amen.

Next week · Week 2: **The Good Samaritan**

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