

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs

Tasting a Sample: *Learning Where We Fit in the Story*

Mark 4:1–20

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The famous eighteenth-century poet Emily Dickinson mused:

Tell all the truth—but tell it slant.

In her poem by that same title, Dickinson declares that truth when told is best absorbed in story. The human mind thinks in pictures, and pictures help us find ourselves in the story being told. In this study we want to explore the very valuable technique in the searching the Scriptures process referred to as *learning where we fit in the story*.



Whetting Your Appetite: Getting Started

At the beginning of this series of studies we learned that the Bible is comprised of varying forms of literature—books of the law, historical books, which are mainly narrative in form, poetry, wisdom literature, prophecy, the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), and the epistles or letters. When Jesus taught, He often told a story to illustrate a particular truth He wanted His listeners to grasp. Jesus was the master at telling the whole truth, but telling it “slant” by telling a story, or *parable*.



Helpful Hint

Locate your Bible dictionary and look up the word *parable*. Read the definition carefully and turn to any examples of parables in the New Testament that are listed. Also, for fun, on a separate notepad, write down as many of the parables of Jesus recorded in the Gospels as you can recall, such as the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Quotable

When you illustrate a truth, you use an illustration from the familiar so that the unfamiliar can be made known.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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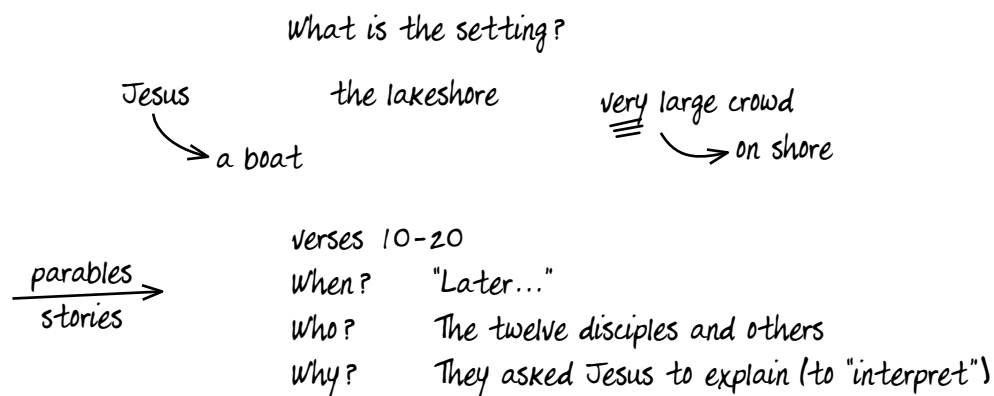
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Using what you have learned about the searching the Scriptures process—primarily the techniques of *observation*, *interpretation*, *correlation*, and *application*—take a closer look at one of the classic stories in all the Scriptures. It's the occasion during Jesus' ministry where, from the bow of a small boat anchored just offshore on the Sea of Galilee, He told a *parable*—a story about a farmer sowing seed. And just in case you are worried about how to *interpret* Jesus' parable, there's no problem. He explained it for us in the same setting!

Turn to Mark 4 in the New Testament. Hold your place in chapter 4 and turn back a few pages to find if there is any introductory material provided for you just prior to chapter 1 of Mark's gospel. If so, read through that section and familiarize yourself with the reason why Mark wrote and if there are any major themes Mark emphasized.

As you begin your study of Mark 4, jot down observations, hints about the setting, and ideas about how you might begin to apply what you are discovering to your life. An example is included below.



Carefully and slowly read Mark 4:1–20. As you read the passage, write down anything you see that is significant. Or simply circle the word or detail in your Bible, or make a note in the margin.

What do you observe about the setting of this story? Who is there? How did Mark describe the crowd of people?



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This would be an excellent time to pause in your study and consult a map of Jesus' ministry. Locate it in the back of your study Bible or in a Bible atlas. Look for the region called *Galilee*. Do you see the Sea of Galilee? What kind of terrain do you think would have been around the lakeshore and surrounding region?



Helpful Hint

When Jesus told the parable of the farmer sowing seed, He likely had the surrounding grain field and rocky shoreline in mind. Look for clues in the text!

By the way, what kind of bird might there be in the area surrounding a large body of water such as the Sea of Galilee? Hold that thought for when you reach the section of Jesus' parable where He described how birds came to snatch away the farmer's seed.

Building Your Story

As you think about how you might teach the truths you discover from Mark 4, write down some notes about a story you could tell to your audience of a time you were by a lakeshore or large body of water and what you experienced. Did you walk a footpath? Were there large sand dunes filled with fluttering birds overhead? Describe the scene and then be prepared to insert that story in your lesson.

Now reread Mark 4:10–20. Read it slowly and with a mind to feel what perhaps the disciples were feeling at this point in the story. Remember: It's important to *find yourself in the story*.

If you don't understand something you are being taught, how do you respond?

How did the disciples respond when they realized they didn't really know what Jesus meant by the parable? What did they do?



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To find ourselves in the story, it helps to ask questions about the situation. For instance:

If you were to choose one of Jesus' types of soil to describe your current readiness to receive and obey God's Word, which soil sample would you choose? Why? Be as specific and transparent as you can in your response.

Who do you most identify with in the story? Would you be one of the disciples, following closely to Jesus but still having questions and maybe even a bit frustrated with His storytelling? Or would you fit more comfortably in the large crowd, preferring to remain anonymous and not yet really accountable but curious? Or do you identify more with the farmer, working hard to plant seeds of spiritual truth but frustrated that such a small percentage of those seeds ever really take root in people's lives? Take some time to think this through.

Perhaps by now you're beginning to see the power of finding yourself in the story, especially as it relates to drawing out the rich and penetrating meanings of these real-life scenarios portrayed in the Scriptures.



YOUR TURN IN THE KITCHEN

Now it's your turn to spend time thinking through some of these principles we studied together. Here are a few more exercises for you to complete to further hone your searching the Scriptures technique. Enjoy finding yourself in God's story!



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1. Read 1 Peter 1:13–2:3 slowly and thoughtfully, and observe the passage carefully. List the types of ungodly behaviors that Peter told believers to rid themselves of.
2. In what ways does Peter's teaching about the significance of obeying God's Word remind you of Jesus' parable of the farmer sowing seed in Mark 4?
3. Since we have tasted that the Lord is good, what nutrition did Peter suggest we are to crave, and why?
4. Read Isaiah 6:10–13. In this passage the prophet Isaiah was calling the people of Judah to surrender their self-reliance and submit to God. What are you to do (and not do) with your eyes, ears, and heart in order to respond in obedience to God's holy Word?
5. Try to find yourself in this scene where Isaiah was preaching. Given the state of your spiritual sensitivity at this point, how do you think you would respond to these convicting words? Explain your answer in the most honest way possible. (Remember: Your transparency will connect deeply with the audience with whom you are communicating truth.)



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A FINAL PRAYER

Lord, how thankful I am to be part of Your great story of salvation . . . that You broke into the dark setting of my stubborn life and rescued me from myself and from my own sinful ways. Teach me to find myself in the wonderful stories of Your Word. And by Your Spirit, transform me more and more into the likeness of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who prompts me to praise You in His name. Amen.



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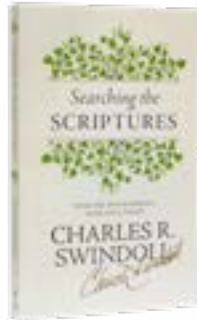
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When the book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* was written, the format for this STS study was developed by Charles R. Swindoll and Rhome van Dyck and published at the end of chapter nine under the title “Your Turn in the Kitchen.” For the 2016 broadcast, this STS study was expanded with additional material by Mark Tobey in collaboration with Charles R. Swindoll based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts.



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