

## LEADER'S GUIDE

### Discussion Questions: Parable of the Mustard Seed

The parable of the mustard seed is described in three of the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew 13:31-32, Mark 4:30-32 and Luke 13:18-19. It is one of the shortest parables Jesus teaches. Jesus illustrates this parable to the growth of the Kingdom of Heaven. The mustard seed starts relatively tiny; it can grow to be one of the largest plants/trees in the garden. The parable is an individual's heart or a church that starts small, vulnerable, and insignificant; it then grows and spreads worldwide.

**Read:** Have someone read either Mark or Luke's full version of the parable of the mustard seed.

1. **Jesus asks the disciples:** (Read the outlined in black, Mark 4:30 and Luke 13:18). **Jesus asks the disciples, what is the kingdom of God like? What do most people would answer when asked this question?** Puffy white clouds, pearly or golden gates, angels floating, some with wings, some without, spirits in white clothing, gold as pavement, and immaculate.
2. **Why would Jesus ask the disciples what parable should be used to describe the Kingdom of Heaven?** If he asks the disciples what parable should be used, Jesus must have already provided them with some parables to fit this answer.
3. **What parables could the disciples use to describe the Kingdom of Heaven?** Some examples could have been the Parable of the Sower, The Parable of the Yeast, The Parable of the Heaven, and the Pearl.
4. **Jesus describes the Kingdom of Heaven:** (Read the outlined in blue, Matthew 13:31, Mark 4:31a, and Luke 13:19a). **How did Jesus describe the Kingdom of Heaven?** In context, the Kingdom of Heaven is not the size of the mustard seed but the process of the kingdom's growth from a nominal size of a mustard seed to a bush large enough to have branches.
5. **PARABLE: Who is the man who plants the mustard seed?** Jesus represents the man planting the mustard seed.
6. **PARABLE: What is the spiritual action of planting the mustard seed?** Jesus plants His word into the hearts of the church. Planting the Word is the beginning of faith in Jesus. Later an example of having faith will be provided in relevance to the size of a mustard seed.
7. **PARABLE: When planting the seed in the field/garden, what or who represents the field/garden?** At the time, the field/garden represented the twelve disciples where the beginning of the church was created. Jesus planted his "seed" within them. It is also an interpretation of the world as the field. Jesus plants the seed in people's hearts. It is up to that individual to allow it to grow and mature.

## LEADER'S GUIDE

### Discussion Questions: Parable of the Mustard Seed

8. **Smallest seeds:** (Read outlined in green, Matthew 13:32a, and Mark 4:31b.) **Are the mustard seeds the smallest of all seeds?** In today's technology, we know several plants have much smaller seeds than mustard seeds. The jewel orchid, for example, measures 0.05 mm in length.
9. **How do Christians defend Jesus' statement?** Jesus used the mustard seed to teach a spiritual concept, not a scientific one. The first-century farmer in that part of the world would identify the black mustard seed as the smallest seed he had ever sowed.
10. **Faith as small as a seed:** (Read Outline in red, Matthew 13:32b, Mark 4:32, and Luke 13:19b) **What does the mustard seed turn into after it is planted?** The seed starts minuscule in its beginning. If cultivated properly, some mustard seeds can grow to the size of a tree 8-12 feet high, the largest of all garden plants. Most mustard plants will grow to be as large as shrubs.
11. **PARABLE: What does the matured growth of the mustard plant or bush represent?** The mustard plant and field grow compared to the size of the kingdom of God.  
**The Leader reads:** "The birds in the air do not represent Satan, the devil, or the wicked one like in the parable of the Sower. In the Old Testament, a tree that grew large enough to support nesting birds was considered healthy and prosperous.
12. **PARABLE: What do the birds represent?** They are not widely known: The birds represent the people of God who find safe harbor in the Church of Christ.
13. **How did the word or kingdom of God grow?** 120 Disciples: Acts 1:15-26. Then Peter's preaching on the Day of Pentecost, Acts 2:14-41, Peter baptized 3,000. It is estimated that by 150 AD, the Way, or the Christian population, grew to 40,000. Then by 200 AD, the population grew to 218,000. By 1910 Christians grew to 600 million, and by 2010 it grew to an estimated 2 billion.
14. **Why did Jesus not explain what the parable means?** Because this was to train the disciples to interpret the parable for themselves. Remember, Jesus asked the disciples, "What parable shall we use to describe the Kingdom of God?"

**Leader:** The kingdom of God starts small as God's word or the beginning of the church. Jesus plants His word into the hearts of the disciples. Jesus plants the seed in people's hearts. It is up to that individual to allow it to grow and mature. The field grows in comparison to the size of the

## LEADER'S GUIDE

### Discussion Questions: Parable of the Mustard Seed

kingdom of God. First to 120 Disciples, then Peter's 3,000 at Pentecost. To an estimated 2 billion today.

Let us conclude with two passages where Jesus references the faith of a mustard seed: (Read outlined in purple Matthew 17:20 and Luke 17:6)

15. **What does Jesus mean when Jesus states, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there...'"?** Jesus compares someone with an infinitely small amount of faith, a size no more significant than the mustard seed, to be granted the ability to move mountains. Jesus reveals to the disciples that all they have to have is faith in Him, and nothing will be impossible.
16. **What does Jesus mean when Jesus states, "You can tell this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you"? Could the tree move on its own?** The mulberry tree is known for having a thick and robust elaborate root system allowing the branches to have widespread arms from the tree trunk. It is this root system that makes the tree an invincible steadfast tree. Lightning or a tornado may be able to take out the tree, but the tree's roots are extremely formidable. Jesus uses this tree as a lesson; by having a tiny amount of faith, the size of a mustard seed, they are empowered to move immovable objects.