

## Liberation Approach

by Joanna Bellis, Courtney Blacksten, Adam Jones, Mark Taylor, Jason Smith

# My Own Backyard: Planting Seeds Where Their Roots Will Grow

## Summary

In this lesson youth will learn the needs that could be in their own backyard. As a group they will come up with their own plan of action to tackle these needs; therefore, the youth not only hear of what people are suffering or struggling with, but that they can take on the responsibility, understanding the importance of God's people taking care of each other.<sup>1</sup> This lesson can be split up into two sessions or one big session.

## Introduction

Sometimes we choose to ignore that people are suffering in our own neighborhood, maybe even our friends, our child's classmates, or perhaps our own relatives. We are choosing to ignore the people in our very own backyard or choosing to be planted in bad soil by not taking care of or helping the problem.

With this lesson, we will let our youth show us how it's done. We will present them with a local problem (maybe even more than one so that they can choose) and they will design a plan of action to help. They will feel a part of making a difference right from the start by taking ownership of the problem. Opening their eyes to a problem and giving them the challenge and opportunity to see how they can make a difference from the start will be a longer-lasting message than a day spent at the soup kitchen. When they see from start to finish that their planning, teamwork, and skills are what made a difference in the lives of those who are suffering, it will encourage not only them but the entire church to pay closer attention to issues close to home.<sup>2</sup> Their ways of thinking will be transformed and they will

<sup>1</sup> Warren, Michael. *Youth, Gospel, Liberation*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

realize that these problems should be and can be solved by all of us. We are planting our youth in good soil and helping them grow by learning how to acknowledge a problem, devise a plan for correcting it, and see the project through to the end.

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With the liberation approach we will open the eyes of youth to take charge and lead the way for the church by their example of taking on the struggles of those around them. We will challenge the youth to take ownership of the problems that maybe no one else has taken the time to consider.

## The Context

This lesson plan would be best used for high school students in a youth group setting. It could be adapted for small or large youth groups, splitting into action planning groups of eight to 10 persons. Groups can all be assigned the same problem for which to make plans or there can be different situations with each group. Internet access or other resources will be helpful in planning their task. There will need to be room for groups to separate from others enough so they can brainstorm together while having room to write on newsprint.

## Theological Exploration

Sometimes we are the seeds who get eaten up by birds because we aren't paying attention. Sometimes we are the seeds that are thrown in rocky soil because we are not paying attention, not taking enough time in our action to see it through. Sometimes we get burned out or only spend one day out of the year doing community service to check that off the youth group "must do list." We don't get rooted in the action and don't stick in for the long haul. Some of us are the seeds who get choked out

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by the thorns because we get tired of all the wear and tear that these actions might need to survive. Then there are those who get planted in the good soil, who have taken the time to plan out every action and have the desire to see it through so that it grows and matures.

### Learning Goals

Upon completing this lesson, students will:

- Be socially aware of the needs in their own backyard (their community).<sup>3</sup>
- Will move from thinking just about their own needs to thinking about the needs of those around them.<sup>4</sup>
- Wrestle with the thought of where their responsibility lies in the larger world.<sup>5</sup>
- Walk away from this lesson with a plan of action.

### Scripture References

- [Matthew 13:1-8](#)

### Exegetical Summary

The parable examined here is most commonly associated with its allegorical interpretation and question, "What kind of soil am I?" (NIB) Originally the parable focused on the abundant harvest showing God's mysterious and wonderful work (NIB). The parable is concerned mostly with the fate of the seed and the reader can see the metaphorical language of "sower" or teacher as well as "harvest" for eschatological ingathering and judgment (NIB). Some evidence points to a harvest of four to tenfold as normal, making a harvest spoken of within the parable as almost unheard of and very surprising (NIB). It is also a possibility that the harvest, while surprising, is not overly exceptional, showing that the Kingdom is a present and not just an end-times picture (NIB). Jesus' point seems to be centered on

starting in the ordinary and understood world and ending in the biblical world of hope and promise (NIB).<sup>6</sup>

It is proposed that Jesus created this parable to strengthen his followers against discouragement in the face of unresponsiveness. (Interpretation) The farmer scatters his seed liberally before plowing, knowing that a good many seeds will not reach maturity, but confident that there will be a good harvest. In this interpretation, the three reasons for failure are not to be pressed allegorically; they are simply illustrations of the frustrations a farmer must face. (Interpretation)<sup>7</sup>

### Preparing for the Lesson

The facilitator should review the following items before implementing the lesson:

- Facilitator will have to have researched local problems in their surrounding area and/or be familiar with them. Hypothetical situations could be used but the effect and purpose of the lesson is to act out the plans the youth come up with from start to finish.
- Most youth have cell phones but parents may not appreciate the bill later if youth use up the minutes, so be sure to have access to phones, unlimited plans, and the use of weekend minutes or ask/warn parents ahead of time.
- While there should be enough volunteers/floater for groups to help bounce off ideas, their purpose is NOT to plan it for them but to help them form possibilities.
- Action planning groups should be divided into eight to 10 youth in a way

<sup>3</sup> Seymour, Jack L., and Donald E. Miller. *Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1982.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 1

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 1

<sup>6</sup> "Matthew 13:1-8." *The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles & Introduction, Commentary, & Reflections for Each Book of the Bible, including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*. Vol. VIII. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994. Print.

<sup>7</sup> Hare, Douglas R. A. "Matthew 13:1-8." *Matthew*. Louisville: John Knox, 1993. Print.

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where different personalities or leadership styles are represented. You can split youth up beforehand or you can do it by asking these questions.

1. If you are a person who doesn't mind talking in front of people, stand along the left wall. If you are a person who would rather not talk in front of the group, stand along the right wall.
  2. With both groups staying on specified walls announce that there is an invisible line to divide the room.
  3. Then proceed in asking these questions: If you are more likely to answer a question with "I feel . . ." go towards the front wall OR if you are more likely to answer the question with "I think . . ." go to the back wall. Remembering that there is an invisible line down the middle.
- After doing this you will have roughly four different personality or leadership types; from there you can number them off into groups so that at least one type is represented in each group.
  - Gather all necessary materials:
    - Collect enough newsprint for each group to have at least two sheets each.
    - Variety of pens/pencils or box of markers for every group.
    - Access to Internet search engine and/or phone books.
    - Video clip from the news about chosen problem (you will also need a way for the entire group to view the clip; a projector may be necessary)
    - Bibles for each group.
    - Star or dot stickers one per person.

- In the second part of the lesson/second session you may need to prepare parents, businesses, or organizations that you may need their help and that they might be receiving a call from your youth.

## Lesson Activities

### *Opening/Gathering (10-15 minutes):*

1. Start off by asking the general question, "What are some problems in our local area where people might be suffering in some way?" Have a group member list the answers on a white board or on newsprint. Maybe someone in the group has identified the problem you would like them to address; if not, maybe the list that they come up with could be possible situations that can be used for groups or used on a later date. Some groups will come up with many; some won't have many at all and that's OK.
2. Once they have come up with a list or have run out of ideas, introduce the problem you've identified in your area to your youth. For instance, the problem could be that there are children in the surrounding area who are going home from school with no food for dinner or on the weekends. The only food these children are receiving comes from the school. So to make this situation more realistic and give the youth the idea of the problem, begin by showing them a clip from a news broadcast. It doesn't have to be a local news station just one that has the same problem. (Clips can be easily found on YouTube for any situation since most problems aren't only local, they are all over the U.S. For this example the clip is titled "Numbers of Hungry Children Increasing In US.") The clip you choose should be no more than five minutes. We want them to

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identify with the problem, not be bored with it by the time the clip is over.

### *Engaging/Exploring (20-25 minutes):*

3. Once they have seen the clip ask questions like, “Did you know that this was happening here where we live? Did you know that some of your classmates might be going to a home where they don’t have any food? Can you imagine being an 8-year-old and the last meal you get to eat each day is the 11:30 a.m. lunch that the school gave you?” You might even want to ask about the kinds of food your youth eat at school, realizing that they may have snack bars that they choose over the main tray with nachos or a slice of pizza. Let them see if their stomachs would be satisfied when they went to bed.
4. Next you will want to divide into action planning groups. (Look under “Preparing for the Lesson” on how to divide groups.) Once the groups are formed, give the following instructions:
  - Read Matthew 13:1-8
  - Once they have read the passage, ask them as a group to discuss how they would react to the situation or problem if they were the seeds dropped into each soil that Jesus described in the parable. (Example: If we were dropped into rocky soil we would probably only be able to feed the children for one day instead of many.)
  - After discussing the different situations ask the youth to brainstorm ideas in their group on how they can act as seeds in good soil and help to feed these children multiple days, not just one day.
  - Once they have brainstormed for a while remind them that every idea is a good idea but not all ideas are feasible

or within our reach. Today they are going to create a plan that they can act on, so in their group they should mark off the ideas that can’t be accomplished at this time. Then they should decide as a group their best idea left on the list.

- Have each group report on their best idea and have a collection of all groups’ newsprint brought to the front. Hang them up so that everyone can see and read them.
- Ask everyone to come together as a whole group. Then announce that all the ideas before them are not a specific group’s anymore; they do not belong to any individual, they all belong to all of us. Each person will be given a sticker to vote on which idea as a whole group we can best be “seeds in good soil” to help solve this problem. Then invite each person to place a sticker on the newsprint beside the idea they each think is best.

### *Responding/Committing 8 minutes):*

5. Once everyone has voted and there is a winning idea get the youth excited about it and offer congratulations for the idea. Ask students how they feel about being the ones to plan out the idea. Ask them if they feel more involved and identify with the problem more after helping think through possible ways to help. Their responses could lead into more questions to ask so be ready.
6. If you choose to do this in two sessions you will announce that next time you will help make plans to actually take on this problem and help make a difference.

### *Closing/Departing (5 minutes):*

7. Then invite everyone to hold hands in a circle and ask for anyone who feels led to pray for the planning of this ministry

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and after everyone who desires to pray is finished, you will close the prayer.

### *Engaging/Exploring Part 2 (30-40 minutes):*

1. If this is second session remind the group of what they did last time, how it all came about, and how we have chosen an idea that will help us be seeds planted in good soil.
2. Ask the group what we need to do to make this happen. Figure out what will be needed to make this plan come into action by making a “to-do” list. For instance, does food need to be collected, advertising done, are there people or businesses to call? Things on the list might even be questions like how are we going to transport everything?
3. Once you have a complete list, make a task force of youth who will volunteer to see it through. It may help if you split items on the list into categories, and then assign them to a task force. Some youth are good with talking on the phone so make them in charge of that task force; some might be really good at designing posters to advertise that you all are collecting food. Utilize their gifts by asking them who might best fit for the different items.
4. Managing the “to-do” list will take time and sometimes marking things off the list might lead to adding more to the list. Be encouraging and help them think through each situation. If something falls through, remind them that’s OK, but to keep trying. This could and probably will take more than one meeting to get it all figured out, depending on your plan of action. Then comes the actual task of putting it into action.

*Closing/Departing (refer back to activity 7)*

## Reflection and Evaluation

When the lesson is complete, the facilitator should reflect on the following questions in order to evaluate the success of the lesson:

- Did the youth respond to the news clip; were they affected by or could they relate in some way?
- Was it easy for the groups to relate the scripture to the task?
- Did everyone walk away feeling like they had a part to play or a task to perform?
- Did the youth wrestle with the idea that they could or couldn’t make a difference or that it was or wasn’t their job to help or fix?
- Were their minds changed or transformed in some way?