

**PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED**  
**MATTHEW 13:31–32**  
**LESSON 6**



**WELCOME**

What small decision or experience ended up making a big impact in your life?

**BACKGROUND**

In **Matthew 13:31–32**, Jesus depicted the growth of a mustard seed into a large plant.<sup>1</sup> This imagery would have been familiar to His hearers, recalling Old Testament passages that pictured great kingdoms as large trees with birds nesting in their branches.<sup>2</sup> “No pious Jew doubted that the [promised] Kingdom would come and that it would be vast and glorious.”<sup>3</sup> However, in this parable Jesus expanded His hearers’ understanding by highlighting not only the grandness of the Kingdom but its tiny beginnings. What may seem insignificant in the eyes of the world has tremendous power and potential for growth in the Kingdom of God.



**WORD**

*As you come to the Word, pause and ask God to make it come alive for you.*

**Context:** Jesus continued explaining to the crowds He was teaching the nature of His Kingdom through the use of agricultural parables.

**Matthew 13:31–32**

*<sup>31</sup> Here is another illustration Jesus used: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. <sup>32</sup> It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, and birds come and make nests in its branches.”*

<sup>1</sup> “From this very tiny seed would grow a large shrub—the largest shrub among all the herbs the farmer would plant in his garden. A mustard shrub could grow 10 to 12 feet in just a few weeks.” Barton, Bruce B. *Life Application Bible Commentary: Matthew*. Tyndale House Publishers, 1996. 270

<sup>2</sup> **Ezekiel 31:3–14; Daniel 4:7–23**

<sup>3</sup> Gaebelien, Frank E., et al. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version of the Holy Bible*. Vol. 8, Zondervan Pub. House, 1984. 318

1. What did Jesus compare the Kingdom of Heaven to? (**Matthew 13:31**)
2. How did Jesus describe the mustard seed? (**Matthew 13:32**)
3. Jesus contrasted the smallness of the mustard seed and the largeness of the garden plant it produces. What truth(s) about the Kingdom of Heaven on earth do you think He wanted His listeners to understand?

“Though the initial appearance of the kingdom may seem inconsequential, the tiny seed leads to the mature plant.”<sup>4</sup>  
What seemingly inconsequential things have you seen lead to spiritual growth and maturity in your own life or the lives of others?

4. What happened as the mustard seed grew into a tree? (**Matthew 13:32**)

What comes to mind as you consider Jesus’ description of the fully grown mustard plant?

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<sup>4</sup> Gaebelein, Frank E., et al. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version of the Holy Bible*. Vol. 8, Zondervan Pub. House, 1984. 318

5. In this parable the birds are drawn to the tree and find safety, shelter and rest in it. Underline how the following Scriptures shed further light on the safety and shelter of God's Kingdom and the comfort found in Him.

a. **Isaiah 25:4**

*But you are a tower of refuge to the poor, O LORD,  
a tower of refuge to the needy in distress.  
You are a refuge from the storm  
and a shelter from the heat. ...*

b. **Matthew 11:28–30**

*Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."*

c. **Psalms 91:1–4**

*Those who live in the shelter of the Most High  
will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.  
This I declare about the LORD:  
He alone is my refuge, my place of safety;  
he is my God, and I trust him.  
For he will rescue you from every trap  
and protect you from deadly disease.  
He will cover you with his feathers.  
He will shelter you with his wings.  
His faithful promises are your armor and protection.*

d. **Matthew 6:25–26**

*"That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are?"*

e. In what ways do/can these verses bring you comfort and rest?

f. In what ways have you experienced the shelter and provision these verses describe?

6. It's interesting to consider how Jesus' disciples would have responded to this parable. As His followers, it's not hard to imagine the confusion or even discouragement they may have felt at how slowly the Kingdom of God was developing. Even after Jesus ascended into heaven there was lots of work still to be done. He left His 12 disciples plus a few hundred other followers with the assignment of extending His Kingdom to all nations. This must have felt like an enormous task for a small group of people who were trying to pioneer a movement that in many ways was still a tiny mustard seed.

a. When have you felt discouraged by the perceived slowness of Kingdom growth in your own life, or the life of your family, church or community?

b. What still feels like a tiny mustard seed to you?

- c. Where have you felt overwhelmed by the Kingdom assignment God has called you to in this season?

Pause and bring this overwhelmed feeling to Jesus in prayer.

## **ALLEGIANCE & INTEGRATION**

***Relinquishing and surrendering our lives to the King with loyalty to Him alone and putting our intellectual understanding of the Kingdom into practice in every aspect of our lives.***

7. Paul reminds us in his first letter to the Corinthians of another helpful principle about growth in the Kingdom: *“I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. It’s not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What’s important is that God makes the seed grow.”*<sup>5</sup> It can be tempting to rely on the efforts of others or even ourselves to produce growth in our lives or the lives of people around us, yet ultimately it’s only God who can provide that growth.
  - a. Where have you been trying to manufacture Kingdom growth that only God can bring?

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:6–7

- b. As you consider your answer to the previous question, what could it look like for you to relinquish control and embrace God's methods and timing for growth?

## **MISSION**

***Living out the Gospel and Kingdom values through faith-filled proclamation and demonstration.***

8. Matthew knew firsthand what it was like to suddenly experience the comfort, shelter and rest that Jesus offered. In response to this, Matthew opened up his home to others as an expression of this Kingdom reality.

*As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Matthew got up and followed him. Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners.*

### **Matthew 9:9–10**

Read through the following verses and underline some ways you could similarly offer comfort, shelter and rest to others:

a. **Matthew 5:42**

*Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow.*

b. **Luke 3:11**

*"If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry."*

c. **James 1:27**

*Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.*

d. **Ephesians 4:32**

*Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.*

- e. How can you demonstrate the Kingdom by extending comfort, shelter and rest to someone this week?



## WORSHIP

***Take a moment to enter into a time of worship—both on your own and with your community—to show praise, adoration and love for God.***

As an act of worship this week, find a seed at home (apple seed, pepper seed, a seed from your spice rack, etc.) and take it on a walk with you. Walk in a place where there are trees and plants around. Pause to look at the seed in your hand and the trees and plants in front of you. As you do so, recall the ways God has grown His Kingdom in you and those around you. Turn these memories into prayer as you praise God for these things.

Also, take a moment to think about areas of your life where you desire further Kingdom growth. Turn these thoughts into prayer as you share your petitions with God. When you arrive home, put the seed in a visible place as a reminder and a prompt for future prayer and worship this week.

## CONVERSATION PROMPTS

***Consider using one of the conversation prompts this week to begin having a spiritual conversation with someone in your life.***

- What small decision or experience ended up making a big impact in your life?
- Where do you find comfort in life?
- Where is a place of rest for you? What about that place makes you feel that way?
- Where have you seen growth in your life? Where do you desire to experience growth in your life?

## TAKE-AWAY SUMMARY

As you have worked through this lesson and listened to Holy Spirit, what is your one significant take-away?

Write a brief summary of your take-away on page 116.



# SERMON NOTES

## Lesson 6

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**Prayer Requests**

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