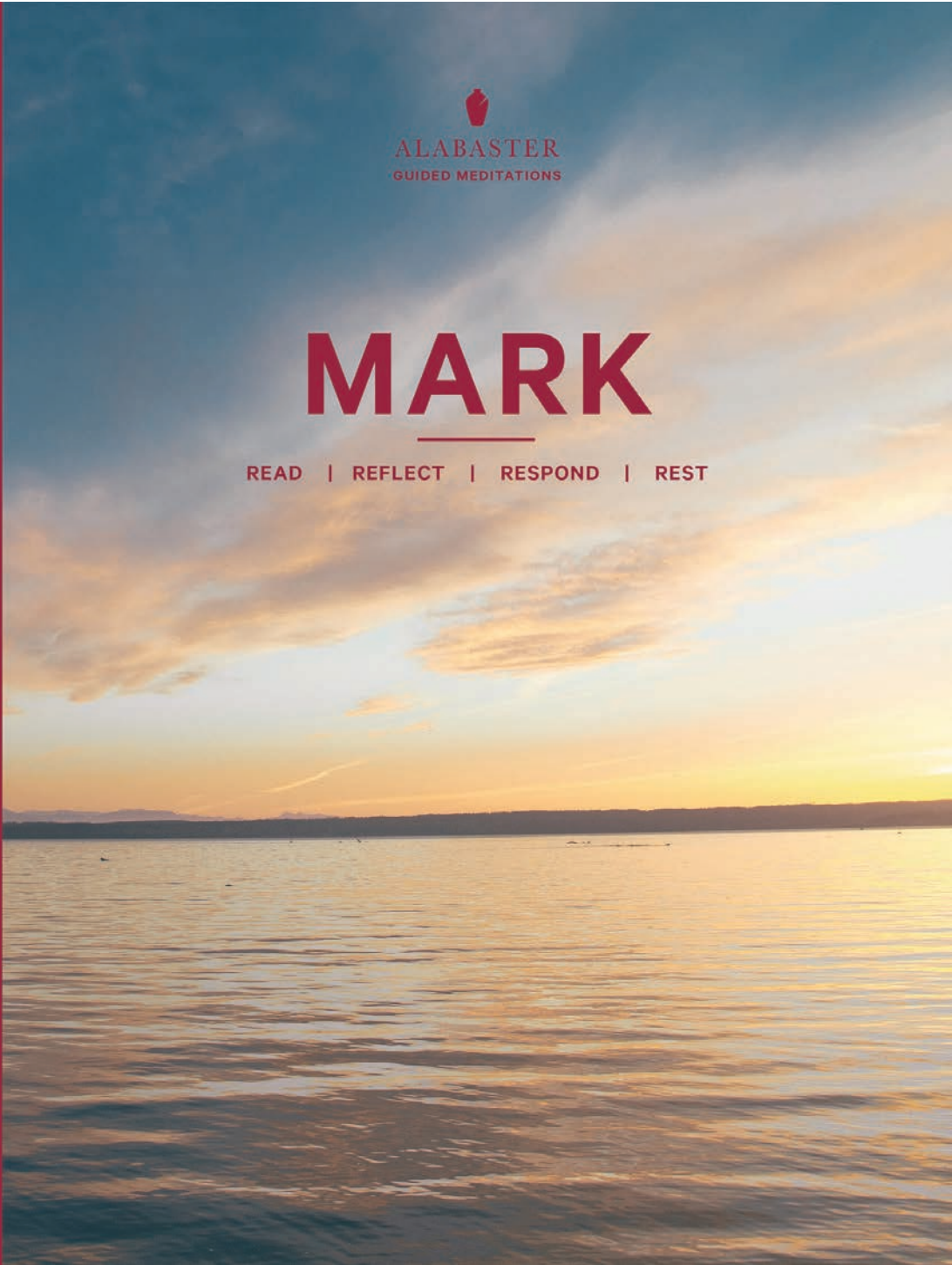




ALABASTER  
GUIDED MEDITATIONS

# MARK

READ | REFLECT | RESPOND | REST



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## 4



### PARABLE OF THE FARMER SCATTERING SEED

<sup>1</sup> Once again Jesus began teaching by the lakeshore. A very large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat in the boat while all the people remained on the shore. <sup>2</sup> He taught them by telling many stories in the form of parables, such as this one: <sup>3</sup> “Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed. <sup>4</sup> As he scattered it across his field, some of the seed fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate it. <sup>5</sup> Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. <sup>6</sup> But the plant soon wilted under the hot sun, and since it didn't have deep roots, it died. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants so they produced no grain.

<sup>8</sup> Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they sprouted, grew, and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!”

<sup>9</sup> Then he said, “Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.” <sup>10</sup> Later, when Jesus was alone with the twelve disciples and with the others who were gathered around, they asked him what the parables meant.

<sup>11</sup> He replied, “You are permitted to understand the secret of the Kingdom of God. But I use parables for everything I say to outsiders, <sup>12</sup> so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled: ‘When they see what I do, they will learn nothing. When they hear what I say, they will not





understand. Otherwise, they will turn to me and be forgiven.”<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “If you can’t understand the meaning of this parable, how will you understand all the other parables?”<sup>14</sup> The farmer plants seed by taking God’s word to others.<sup>15</sup> The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message, only to have Satan come at once and take it away.<sup>16</sup> The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy.<sup>17</sup> But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last

long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word.<sup>18</sup> The seed that fell among the thorns represents others who hear God’s word,<sup>19</sup> but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, so no fruit is produced.<sup>20</sup> And the seed that fell on good soil represents those who hear and accept God’s word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!”



# PARABLE OF THE FARMER SCATTERING SEED

## MARK 4:10-20

### READ

1. Read the passage. What word or phrase stands out?
2. Look at the photo on page 20.
3. Take a breath, slowly inhaling God's presence and exhaling distractions, worries, or concerns.

### REFLECT

1. Read the passage again.
2. This account addresses parables, seeds, soil, and growth in the kingdom of God. Sometimes we become frustrated because we want growth to be controlled by our human effort. What if this passage is here to reveal a vision for growth that is holistic, organic, and somewhat mysterious?
3. Look at the photo again. What words would you use to describe this image? Bright, alive, slow? What feelings does it evoke for you?
4. Is there a specific detail of this picture that stands out to you? The way the sunlight is hitting the leaves, the colors, or the hanging fruit? Are you drawn to one of these elements, something else, or the overall feel of the photo?
5. Different plants require different things to grow, such as water, light, air, nutrients, temperature, space, or time. What do you uniquely need to grow?

6. Imagine that you are a plant God is tending. How do you imagine God's presence while cultivating your growth?

### RESPOND

1. Read the passage a third time.
2. Pray: *Spirit of God, you lovingly tend to my growth.*
  - *What do you want to say to me through the details of this passage and image?*
  - *What are the thoughts or feelings that make it hard for me to trust your work to grow me?*
  - *How are you inviting me to receive what I need from you?*

### REST

1. Take another deep breath.
2. Notice what it feels like today to be in God's presence. Where do you sense connection to God in your heart, soul, mind, or body?
3. How do you want to express gratitude for God's character and work in your life?



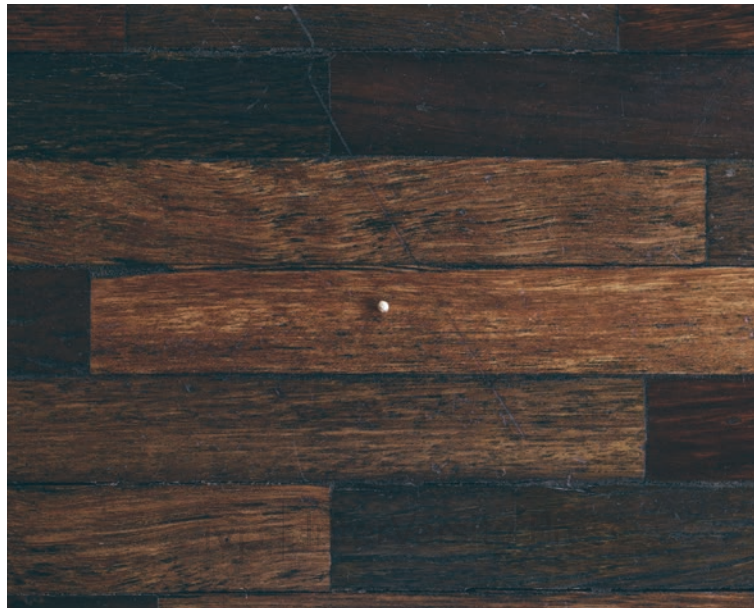
### PARABLE OF THE LAMP

<sup>21</sup> Then Jesus asked them, “Would anyone light a lamp and then put it under a basket or under a bed? Of course not! A lamp is placed on a stand, where its light will shine. <sup>22</sup> For everything that is hidden will eventually be brought into the open, and every secret will be brought to light. <sup>23</sup> Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.” <sup>24</sup> Then he added, “Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given—and you will receive even more. <sup>25</sup> To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even

what little understanding they have will be taken away from them.”

### PARABLE OF THE GROWING SEED

<sup>26</sup> Jesus also said, “The Kingdom of God is like a farmer who scatters seed on the ground. <sup>27</sup> Night and day, while he’s asleep or awake, the seed sprouts and grows, but he does not understand how it happens. <sup>28</sup> The earth produces the crops on its own. First a leaf blade pushes through, then the heads of wheat are formed, and finally the grain ripens. <sup>29</sup> And as soon as the grain is ready, the farmer comes and harvests it with a sickle, for the harvest time has come.”



# PARABLES OF THE LAMP AND THE GROWING SEED

MARK 4:21-29

## READ

1. Read the passage. What word or phrase stands out?
2. Look at the photos on page 22.
3. Take a breath, slowly inhaling God's presence and exhaling distractions, worries, or concerns.

## REFLECT

1. Read the passage again.
2. These parables explore the images of a lamp bringing light and the potential of seeds to sprout and grow. Sometimes we get stuck on the reality of our sin. What if these images are here to call attention to the fact that we are also brimming with light, potential, and good?
3. Look at the photos again. What words would you use to describe these images? Focused, still, hopeful? What feelings do they evoke for you?
4. Is there a specific detail that stands out to you? The curves of the filament, the line of the lamp stand, or the contrast between seed and wood? Are you drawn to one of these elements, something else, or the overall feel of the photos?

5. Imagine yourself as the lamp or the seed. How does Jesus want to affirm you, your unique personality, or your sense of calling (whether that's currently clear or fuzzy)?

## RESPOND

1. Read the passage a third time.
2. Pray: *Spirit of God, you see me for who I am, not just what is sinful and broken but also what is light and good.*
  - *What do you want to say to me through the details of this passage and these images?*
  - *What are the self-critical thoughts that cause me to be discouraged?*
  - *How are you inviting me to step into my true identity rooted in you and your words about me?*

## REST

1. Take another deep breath.
2. Notice what it feels like today to be in God's presence. Where do you sense connection to God in your heart, soul, mind, or body?
3. How do you want to express gratitude for God's character and work in your life?



**PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED**

<sup>30</sup> Jesus said, “How can I describe the Kingdom of God? What story should I use to illustrate it? <sup>31</sup> It is like a mustard seed planted in the ground. It is the smallest of all seeds, <sup>32</sup> but it becomes the largest of all garden plants; it grows long branches, and birds can make nests in its shade.” <sup>33</sup> Jesus used many similar stories and illustrations to teach the people as much as they could understand. <sup>34</sup> In fact, in his public ministry he never taught without using parables; but afterward, when he was alone with his disciples, he explained everything to them.

**JESUS CALMS THE STORM**

<sup>35</sup> As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s cross to the other side of the lake.” <sup>36</sup> So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). <sup>37</sup> But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water. <sup>38</sup> Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, “Teacher, don’t you care that we’re going to drown?” <sup>39</sup> When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Silence! Be still!” Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. <sup>40</sup> Then he asked them, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?” <sup>41</sup> The disciples were absolutely terrified. “Who is this man?” they asked each other. “Even the wind and waves obey him!”

