

Parables: Jesus the Storyteller


Part 1: The Sower

TALKING WALKING

Leaders' Guide

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Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Discussion & Reflection

- 1 What from Sunday's message interested you? ...made sense to you? ...confused you? ...intrigued you? ...upset you? ...encouraged you? ...and **why**?
- 2 Read Luke 8:5-15. Notice how v. 5 connects with v. 11-12; v. 6 connects with v. 13; v. 7 connects with v. 14; and v. 8 connects with v. 15. Describe each "soil"—each **heart**—in **your own** words.
- 3 Did the sower sow better seed some places (e.g. on soil 4) and inferior seed elsewhere? Do birds' flight paths follow roads? Both of those questions obviously require a negative answer. So, what explains such a difference in yield rates? What are the implications of this to your life?
- 4 Our text shows that the seed of God's word cannot penetrate the soil of a hard-hearted person, resulting in the person not being saved (v.12c). Do you know or love such a person? Tell us about them. What can and should we do for such a person?
- 5 What **emotional** response did soil 2 have to the Word of God (v. 13)? Who do you know like that? What can and should we do for such a person?
- 6 List **all** the things that v. 14 say "choke out" the Word of God. Place a "☹" next to those we typically would label as "bad" or "hard" experiences and a "😊" next to those we typically think of as "good" or "pleasant" experiences. What do you notice? Are you surprised? Tell about someone you know—*no names, please!*—who worried so much they were unfruitful for God. Tell about someone you know who is unfruitful thanks to riches and pleasures.
- 7 Notice that the disciples **didn't** understand the parable **when** Jesus told it—but they **wanted to!** (v. 9) And clearly they **ultimately were** "good soil". It's easy to see the difference between hard-hearted rejection and **mature** "hundred-fold" good soil, but what do you think "receptive, yet lacking full understanding" (as with the disciples) looks like? Who do you know who may be in that category?

What can and should we do for such a person?

Application-Challenge

- Submit to Christ's Lordship. This is the bedrock decision from which all fruit-bearing flows.
- Spend time each day cultivating a deeper, more accurate knowledge of God.
- Obey God in the area(s) that he has been convicting you.

1 Standard “softball” opening question. If any points of the sermon confused folks, take a few moments to review the Sermon Outline/Notes to clear up an confusion.

2 Luke gives the parable in v. 5-8, and then the interpretation of the parable in v. 11-15.
Help your group members see the “pairs” of verses that go together:
Verse 5 is interpreted in v. 11-12; v. 6 is interpreted in v. 13; v. 7 is interpreted in v. 14; v. 8 is interpreted in v. 15.
After they’ve observed the structure of the passage, work together on describing each soil in your own words.

3 Read this entire block, and then as a group answer the **first** of the two final questions (“...what explains the difference...”). The answer clearly is that the condition of the soil is the **only** variable in Jesus’ story.

Only after that observation has been made, and the significance of it observed, should ou move onto the final question (“...implications to your life?”). Don’t rush over either of these questions; they are the key to to this entire teaching.

4 Read this entire block of content, and then ask for volunteers to tell about their “soil #1 person”. You may need to “prime the pump”, so be ready to share your own story (but rush to fill the silence; give folks time to think). This question, and the following ones, should of course remain anonymous. The question of “What can and should we do for such a person?” is a complex one. Clearly we can and should pray. Whether or not humans are able to “till the soil” of another person’s heart (ie, soften it and increase its receptivity) is an open question. You could explore the implications of 1 Peter 3:15b together.

5 The same instructions apply to this question.
Since the problem of soil 2 is quick emotionalism, but with no stability to resist temptation, you could consider exploring Luke 9:62, discussing the role of decisiveness in discipleship.

- 6
- “worries” 😞
 - “riches” 😊
 - “pleasures of this life” 😊

Take time to explore the fact that we can become derailed through pleasant/good opportunities. For example, consider the person who buys a new bass boat or beach house (good, pleasant things)—often their obedience to Hebrews 10:23-25 goes out the window.
Since the problem of soil 3 is competing loyalties, you could consider exploring Matthew 6:25-34 or 1 Timothy 6:6-19, discussing the issue of priorities in life.

7 The essence of this question is, “How do we recognize potential in a ‘diamond in the rough’?”
How do we spot potential, even if the person still has a bunch of rough edges. How do we help them develop? A study of John-Mark may be helpful here. Notice the contours of his service to Christ:

1. Colossians 4:10 & Acts 13:4-5 (John-Mark is Barnabas’ young, inexperienced cousin who joins Paul and Barnabas as a helper on their missionary journey.)
2. Acts 13:13 (John-Mark abandons Paul and Barnabas halfway through the missionary journey.)
3. Acts 15:36-41 (For the next missionary journey, Paul refused to take the unreliable John-Mark.)
4. 2 Timothy 4:11 (Years later, John-Mark has matured and is an appreciated co-worker with Paul.)

Sermon Summary (Key Text: Luke 8:4-15)

Have you ever wondered why some people are open to spiritual truth, whereas others are not? Well, Jesus explained the answer to this mystery through a parable found in Luke 8:4-15, “The Parable of the Sower”. (A parable is a story taken from common, everyday life, used to convey some spiritual truth.) Jesus told the Parable of the Sower to explain the reason for peoples’ conflicting responses to him. In verses 11-15, Jesus pulled his disciples away privately and explained the meaning of the parable. According to Jesus, **[a]** the seed represents the word of God, **[b]** the sower is someone who communicates God’s Word to others, **[c]** the differing soils represent the differing responses people have to Biblical truth. We can expect people to have one of four different responses to the Word of God.

[1] The first kind of response we can expect is “unbelief” (vv. 5, 12). **[2]** The second response is belief followed by apostasy (falling away from the faith) due to temptation (vv. 6, 13). Some Bible students believe that this particular individual was not a Christian at all. They take this position because of the apparent defectiveness of this person’s faith. This pastor, however, believes that the person represented in this second soil is a believer. According to verse 13, there was germination and initial growth, a sure sign of life. The problem is that there was not a deep enough root system to sustain a life of perseverance. I believe this type of soil represents someone who experienced a genuine saving faith in Christ, but in the face of temptation, withered away. He didn’t fall away from eternal life, but from following Jesus in discipleship. So while he didn’t lose his salvation, he suffered the loss of his reward in eternity. **[3]** The third response we can expect is belief followed by carnality due to a preoccupation with the things of this world (vv. 7, 14). Carnality here is defined as a Christian who is knowingly disobedient to Christ for a period of time. His lifestyle in many ways imitates that of the non-Christian (1 Cor. 3:4). **[4]** The final response is found in verse 15: belief followed by sustained fruit-bearing (vv. 8, 15). This is the person whose growth in Christlikeness is obvious to all. In his life, we see Galatians 5:22-23 on display. Not perfectly—but obviously.

From this parable emerge five important implications for the lives of believers:

- ❶** We are to share the good news of Jesus Christ with everyone. In this parable, the sower wasn’t particular about who he shared his faith with. He didn’t try to predetermine whom he thought was a good candidate for spiritual things and who was not. He just sowed the seed.
- ❷** We should expect different responses to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This parable tells us that not everyone will respond to the gift of forgiveness and eternal life. You see, this parable also tells us that some will respond to the gospel message. The problem is we don’t know who will and who won’t! But that is not our responsibility; it is God’s responsibility to bring about new life. It is our responsibility to share the message. We leave the results to God.
- ❸** We need to be aware that three enemies oppose the work of God’s Word in our life: the world, the flesh, and the devil. In the parable we are studying today, we see the influence of all three. One of Satan’s objectives is to hinder people from coming to faith in Christ. If his efforts fail there, then his next objective is to render believers ineffective in their God-given mandate to be salt and light in the world; that is, to be influential and make a positive difference in the world.
- ❹** We must realize that a good start is no guarantee of a successful finish. Some Christians will leave the faith due to trials and tribulations. But if you walk with God faithfully every day, the future will take care of itself. Oh, you can expect challenges along the way. The world, the flesh, and the devil assure us of that. But as we make daily decisions to walk obediently with God, we lay the groundwork for future fruitfulness.
- ❺** God desires that we be fruitful! Now, we can’t do this in our own power. But that is not God’s plan, anyway. We bear fruit; that is, we grow and change into Christlikeness as we abide in Christ (John 15:4).

Jesus wants us to live our lives in the power which he supplies. He wants us to learn to trust him, to walk by faith and not by sight. He wants to transform our character. He wants to use us to reach out and share God’s Love with our non-Christian friends and neighbors. He wants us to exercise our spiritual gifts and talents in the context of a local body of believers so that we can mature both as individuals and as a church. None of us have “arrived.” I certainly haven’t. But we should be moving in this direction. We should be becoming more fruitful. That is God’s desire, and that is what he is trying to do in your life.

Digging Deeper in your Daily Quiet Time

Jesus' "Parable of the Soils" is found in Matthew 13:1-11, 13-23, Mark 4:1-20, and Luke 8:4b-15. Each gospel writer tells the same story, but with slight variations in details. Here is the parable with all of their details blended together.

The Parable

Jesus began to teach. He went out of the house and sat down beside the sea. Large crowds gathered around, so he boarded a boat and sat in it, while the crowd stood nearby on the shore. He used parables to teach them many things.

"Listen," he said. "A farmer went out to sow his seed. Some seed fell on the pathway where it was trampled, and the birds swooped down and ate it. Other seed fell on rocky places, where there was little soil. It quickly sprouted up. But because it had no root and lacked moisture, it withered away as soon as the sun rose to scorch it. Other seed fell into a thorn patch where the thorns choked out any growth. But some seed fell into good soil and produced a crop—thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as was sown." Then Jesus called out, "Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear!"

The Importance of this Parable

When Jesus was at last alone, the twelve disciples, along with some others came and asked him, "Why are you speaking in parables to them? And what does this parable mean?" He answered, "You have been given the privilege of knowing the mysteries of the reign and rule of heaven, the reign and rule of God, but others have not been so privileged. That is why I speak to them in parables, so that though they see, they may not understand, and though they hear, they will not comprehend. Otherwise they may turn and be forgiven.

The prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled in them:

You will indeed hear, but will not comprehend; you will indeed see, but will not understand at all. For this people has hardened its heart; their ears are full of wax, and their eyes are shut tight—otherwise they might see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand in their heart, and turn back so that I might save them.

"But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear! I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see the things you're seeing, yet did not see them, and to hear the things you're hearing, yet did not hear them." Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? If not, how will you understand any of the parables?"

The Interpretation of the Parable

"Understand then, what the parable of the farmer means: The seed is the word of God; the farmer is sowing the word. When anyone hears the word of the reign and rule and doesn't understand it, then Satan, the evil one, comes immediately to snatch away what was sown in the person's heart, so he cannot believe and be saved. This is the person on whom the seed was sown on the pathway.

"In a similar way, the one who received seed on the rocky places is the person who hears the word and immediately receives it with delight. But because he isn't well-rooted, he continues in his faith only a little while. When hardships or persecution come his way because of the word, immediately he stumbles and falls away.

"The person who received seed among the thorns is the one who hears the word and goes his way. But the worries of this world, the pleasures of life, the seductiveness of wealth, and the passionate desires for material things creep in and choke out the word, making it unfruitful. No fruit ever ripens.

"The person who received the seed on the good soil is the one who hears the word with an honest and good heart. He welcomes it, understands it, grips it tightly, and patiently bears much fruit—thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as was sown.

Monday—Read all three sections above ("The **Parable**", "The **Importance** of this Parable", and "The **Interpretation** of the Parable")

- What general impression do you get?
- What about it makes sense to you? confuses you? disturbs you? excites you?
- Which soil do you think you are? What should you do next?

Tuesday—Read section two, "The **Importance** of this Parable"

- Doesn't Jesus sound, well, "mean" in this section?! Is he? How do you know that?
- It sounds as if he's **trying to exclude** people, doesn't it? Is he? How do you know that?
- Why did Jesus speak in parables?

Wednesday—Read sections one and two, "The **Parable**" and "The **Importance** of this Parable".

- To whom did he speak this parable? (See the opening paragraph of "The Parable".)
- To whom did he address the "Application-Challenge"? (See the last line of "The Parable"—"Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear!")
- **This is extremely important:** **Who** turned out to have "ears to hear"? (See the first line of "The Importance of the Parable".) Two groups of people "had ears to hear": "the twelve" and "some others". (See the first line of "The Importance of the Parable".) Could **anyone** be among "the twelve"? (See Luke 6:13) **Who decided** who would be "the twelve"? Could **anyone** be among the "some others"? **Who decided** who would be among the "some others"?

Thursday—Read sections two and three, "The **Importance** of this Parable" and "The **Interpretation** of the Parable".

- According to the first paragraph of section two, if you don't "understand/comprehend" the parable, you won't "turn and be _____". Does that sound fair to you? Why or why not?
- **Both** "the twelve" (whom **Jesus** chose) and the "some others" (who **chose themselves**) received the interpretation of the parable. So, **who didn't get to** hear the interpretation? Is that fair? Why or why not?
- According to Isaiah's prophecy (in section two, in *italics*), **who hardened** these people's hearts? According to Isaiah's prophecy, **with what organ** does one "understand"? According to Isaiah's prophecy, **what does God do** for the person who "understands and turns"?
- So, according to this parable, both "the twelve" and "some others" got to be saved. **Who decided** who was in the "some others"?

Friday—Read section three, "The **Interpretation** of the Parable"

- Rewrite Jesus' descriptions of each of the four soils in your own words.
- Do you see elements of several soils in your life? Which negative elements do you observe?
- Which of the following positive elements (ie, of the good soil) do you see in your life?
 - ☐ "hears the Word of God with an honest and good heart"
 - ☐ "welcomes the Word of God"
 - ☐ "understands the Word of God"
 - ☐ "grips the Word of God tightly"
 - ☐ "patiently bears much fruit"

Saturday—Read all three sections, "The **Parable**", "The **Importance** of this Parable", and "The **Interpretation** of the Parable"

- Which soil are you? Give evidence for your answer.
- What must you do next in order to be "good soil"?

Need help becoming fruitful soil?
write to:

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