

Let Anyone With Ears Listen

“We need some good dirt,” the boy’s green-thumbed grandmother declared as they prepared to plant spring flowers. She knew that bountiful blossoms depend upon planting seeds in “good dirt” - soil that is full of minerals and gets sufficient moisture, soil that is well-supported and compacted to survive wind and rain, and soil that is not infested by weeds and pests who choke away life.

Jesus teaches that our lives as His followers will produce amazing results when we plant ourselves in an environment that nourishes and sustains our faith.



In this morning’s Parable of the Sower, Jesus uses a story about farming to illustrate spiritual growth and God’s extravagant love. The meaning of the parable can be interpreted in two ways:

1. To show that Jesus came to share the Word of God everyone. We don’t serve a stingy God who picks and chooses who is good enough to hear the Word. He generously sows into everyone who is willing to accept his Word.
2. To help us self-reflect, to understand which soil we are and realize our potential of embracing the abundant love of God and sharing His truth.

The farmer, or sower, in this story is Jesus, the seed is His message, and the soil is our hearts. How we respond to the messages of the God’s Word is represented by the four soils Jesus describes.

The sower scatters his seed generously and it ends up on four different types of terrain:on the side of the road....on rocks....in thorny soil, and some in good soil. The first three groups of seed die and the seed planted in the good soil flourishes. And we immediately say, “I want to be the good soil.” Or we say, “I know some people who are like the rocky soil,” and, “Let’s pray for those who are stuck in the thorny soil.”

Upon the initial reading of this parable we often focus on the soil. But when we reread the parable from the perspective of the sower, we get a better understanding of why Jesus called it the *Parable of the Sower*, not the *Parable of the Soils*.

Jesus shares that the sower scattered seed on all types of ground. It didn’t say that he was meticulously planting the seeds in designated ‘good soil’ areas – it says he was scattering the seed everywhere. Three quarters of the seed is wasted.

Is the sower reckless or extravagant? If I were planting a field, why would I throw seed on rocks, thorns, and the side of the road? Wouldn’t I want to be careful and put the seed in the good soil from the beginning?

Dr. David Lose posits that the "crazy abandon" of the sower "hint[s] about the character of the kingdom Jesus preaches. It is a place where God's love and God's word are scattered with equal abandon, with no regard for how any of it will be received.

It's as if God just can't help but share love and grace and mercy and will do so recklessly, even wastefully, because God alone knows that grace is never exhausted and love never wasted." (Daily Bread: Matthew 13:1-9, August 9, 2014, davidlose.net)

Rev. Jo Anne Taylor, in her sermon on Matthew's parable, says that this story is "filled with the promise of lavish abundance, even in the face of rejection and the hard realities of living in this world. Some of [us] may have come to expect scarcity instead of abundance. [Our] experiences have taught [us] to assume that there is not enough – not enough love, not enough joy, not enough grace – and [we've] come to expect that [we] are going to get the short end of the stick, that someone is going to do [us] wrong. But God is a God of extravagance! He does not hold anything back. God doesn't worry if there will be enough to go around. God wants our hearts to be good soil." (A Pastor Sings blog, "It's Not About the Dirt" by Jo Anne Taylor, August 13, 2017, pastorsings.com)

“Let anyone with ears listen!” What are the four soils Jesus describes?

First ~ ‘Seeds on the Path’

This is the ‘in one ear, and out the other’ crowd ~ they hear but don't listen; nothing sinks in.

Do you pray from your heart or do you recite prayers from memory while your thoughts wander? (findinggodamongus.com)

The second soil ~ ‘Some Fell On Rocky Ground’

Some people are like shallow soil. They burst into action with new life but fizzle when things heat up. It's a superficial faith that springs up only when times are good; their faith lack roots. They are 'fair-weather' Christians.

Do you make time for God in your busy schedule or do you give God time only if you have any left? (findinggodamongus.com)

Others are like the third soil ~ ‘thorny ground. They are choked to death before they can mature. They respond to the gospel but the worries of life or the pleasures of the world quickly chokes their spiritual life.

The person hears the word, but does nothing with it. This is best illustrated by a quote from C. S. Lewis who said, "If you live for the next world, you get this one in the deal; but if you live only for this world, you lose them both." (goodreads.com)

Do you take an honest look at your faith and strive to grow closer to God or are you satisfied with your current relationship with Him? (findinggodamongus.com)

These first three soils represent hearts that are not ready.

And lastly, the fourth soil ~ ‘the good soil, the ready heart’

This listener who, like good soil, truly hears, understands and receives the Word. They are the ones whose ears listen, blessed beyond measure, becoming fruitful Christians.

Do you want to learn more, do more, and be more for Jesus? (findinggodamongus.com)

The parable of the sower and the soils teaches the importance of how we respond to God's Word. Good dirt is not easily swept away.

Good dirt is not overrun with pests, pollution, or weeds, which choke our spiritual growth.

We need to ask ourselves, "What kind of soil am I? Am I like the hard soil on the path, or the rocky soil, or the thorny soil, or the good soil?"

If we are honest, we will probably have to admit that, at different stages in our lives, we have been all four soils.

“Let anyone with ears listen!”

John Chrysostom was one of the most captivating preachers of the early Christian church.

However, he recognized that even great [speakers] cannot make everyone listen.

He noted, “My preaching is addressed to all...but it is the duty of each one of my listeners to take what is suited for his affliction. I do not know who are sick, or who are healthy. Therefore, I discuss subjects of every sort and suited to every illness.” (“Good Soil” by Haddon W. Robinson, Our Daily Bread, October 2, 1994)

Some listeners are like rich soil, and the message takes root in their heart. Other audiences resemble the church parking lot, and the seed simply bounces off them. Still others are like a weed patch that chokes potential growth. We need to “drink in” the teaching of the Word just as the sick need medicine or as crops need rain. (Twelve Truths That Jesus Taught About Farming by Paul Fritz, August 19, 2004, sermoncentral.com)

“Let anyone with ears listen!” Jesus exclaimed at the end of the parable, and two thousand years later, this is still a call to us, to listen, to be open, to let the words of God, the seed, be planted in our soul to grow, to sprout, to bear fruit.

How well have your ears been listening this morning? Take some time to make an honest assessment. No one has to know your answer ~ and God already knows anyway!

Amen.

