

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Good Soil Leads to Fruitful Lives.*"

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's Gospel verse-by-verse and we find ourselves at the end of the Parable of the Soils. We've discussed three of the soils and this morning we'll look at the fourth.

Let me briefly explain the verses so you understand why we're looking at them out of order:

- In verses 5 through 8 Jesus teaches the Parable of the Soils.
- In verses 9 and 10 He explains why He started teaching in parables.
- In verses 11 through 15 Jesus explains the Parable of the Sower.

What I've decided to do is look at the soil in verses 5 through 8, and then look at the explanation of that soil in verses 11 through 15.

Something else I've tried to do is point out that each soil represents a different group of people. I left three lessons on your bulletins from the previous sermon. Let's briefly look at them to review the first three groups...

LESSON 1: THE SEED ON THE PATH PICTURES HARD HEARTS.

This soil represents those hostile to the Word of God:

- They are stubborn and rebellious.
- They don't respond positively to the Word in any way.

As a result, the seed doesn't enter the soil – or penetrate their hearts – at all.

- These people don't look like followers of Christ.
- This soil pictures the religious leaders in Jesus' day, or anyone in our day who shows a antagonism to Christ.

The second soil...

LESSON 2: THE SEED ON ROCKY GROUND PICTURES SHALLOW FAITH.

These people are the opposite of the first soil: they respond quickly and joyfully to the Word of God:

- They look like they can't get enough of church and sermons.
- But their faith is shallow, so when trials or persecution comes, their faith disappears.

The third soil...

LESSON 3: THE SEED AMONG THORNS PICTURES PEOPLE WHO CHOKE GOD OUT OF THEIR LIVES.

Most commentators point out the **thorns** should be viewed as weeds, and **verse 14** says they represent **cares, riches, and pleasures** that compete for the place God should have in their lives. These are worries, love for riches, and pleasurable pursuits that don't leave any room for God.

Now we can look at the fourth and final soil...

8a But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.

Notice the words **yielded a crop a hundredfold**.

This is a truly amazing result. You've got a little **seed** but it yielded a **hundredfold**.

Since the seed represents the Word of God and the soil represents a person's heart, the idea is God's Word can produce a truly amazing crop in someone's life. This shows what God's Word can do in a receptive heart.

Now look at the rest of **verse 8**...

8b When He had said these things He cried, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

This parable is in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and all three accounts include this statement.

Notice the words **He cried** or most translations say **He called out**. Jesus said these words differently and w/ more passion than He said the rest of His words.

In **verse 9** the **disciples asked, "What does this parable mean?"** More than likely they said this b/c they recognized how important it was for them to understand.

The word **hear** occurs 9 times in this section...

We know from our first sermon on this parable that this means more than just listening physically:

- The fact is everyone heard Jesus teach this parable, but many of the people had the first three soils.
- They heard Him physically, but they didn't hear Him spiritually.

The **seed** – or Word – didn't take root in their hearts.

And this brings us to Lesson 4...

LESSON 4: WE MUST BE INTENTIONAL IN OUR HEARING.

If you've taught kids before, you've probably said to them, *"Hey, I know you can HEAR me, but I also want you to UNDERSTAND me. This is important! Grasp the significance of what I'm saying."*

That's what Jesus is doing:

- He's inviting us to exercise our minds in trying to grasp the spiritual significance of His teaching.
- He's emphasizing the importance of paying attention, and I really appreciate the balance that's created.

Please follow me...

In **verse 10** Jesus said, **“To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest *it is given in parables*, that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’”**

We talked about this verse a few weeks ago, and that it means God reveals spiritual truths to some and not others. This makes it seem like there’s no responsibility on the hearer.

But then you read these words from Jesus in **verse 8** and there’s clearly responsibility on the hearers!

- Jesus is saying we have to put forth effort to understand!
- The Lord reveals spiritual truths to us, but we still have to be intentional in our hearing!

Let me be clear about the application this has for us, and I want to illustrate this by sharing something from my days in the Catholic Church...

When I was Catholic my view of church was you go, check it off the list, and then you’re done until the following week:

- It didn’t really matter whether your heart or mind were engaged as long as you were physically present.
- It was simply about going through the motions and fulfilling your weekly religious activity.

And I think the truth is we can all be like this! We think, “Well, I went to church, so I did what I’m supposed to do.” But...

- Maybe we don’t pay attention.
- We don’t take notes.
- We’re checking our phones...I know a bunch of people in the fellowship hall and balcony just put their phones away.
- We’re waiting for the service to be over.

Essentially our hearts and minds are not engaged.

Jesus says that’s not enough. You’ve got to be paying attention. Jesus would say – or **cry** - **“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”**

And of all the words Jesus said, these words are some of the most important, because here’s the truth:

- It doesn’t matter what Jesus says...
- It doesn’t matter how great or profound it is...
- It doesn’t matter how life-changing it is...

If people didn’t pay attention and hear spiritually.

So please keep this in mind when you come to church:

- God wants to speak to you through the music...

- He wants to speak to you through the communion devotional...
- He wants to speak to you through the sermon...

But you've got to pay attention – you've got to be intentional in your hearing – striving to spiritually understand w/ your heart and mind.

Let's look at the explanation of the soil in **verse 15**...

¹⁵ But the ones *that* fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep *it* and bear fruit with patience.

And this brings us to Lesson 5...

LESSON 5: THE SEED ON GOOD GROUND PICTURES SALVATION...

Let me remind you of something...

You've got the same sower, same seed, and the seed is sown the same way. The only difference is the soil. Or in other words, the only reason the seed produced a crop this time is the soil – or heart – is **noble and good**.

Since we all want to have this heart, the obvious question is, what makes a soil – or heart – **noble and good**?

The answer is it's free from the weaknesses that plagued the other soils. If we think about what ruined the other soils, we can see why this soil is good:

- This soil isn't hardened and stubborn like the first soil, which is to say you're humble and receptive.
- This soil isn't lacking in depth – it's not shallow – like the second soil, which is to say your faith is deep and sincere.
- This soil isn't infested w/ weeds like the third soil, which is to say God isn't being choked out of your life by **cares, riches, and pleasures of this life**.

This allows a soil to be suitable for healthy plant growth.

Now if you look back at **verse 15** I want you to notice there's a progression, which I want to briefly discuss...

First, it says people **hear the word**, which means they hear the Gospel. People can only be saved by hearing the Gospel.

Then it says they **keep [the word]**, or other translations say **retain it, cling to it, or hold it fast to it**. This means it's buried in their hearts...and this brings us to the next part of Lesson 5...

LESSON 5: THE SEED ON GOOD GROUND PICTURES SALVATION AND (PART I) GOD'S WORD IS KEPT IN THE HEART.

I shared w/ you in an earlier sermon that I really love the image this parable creates:

- I love how the seed pictures God's Word.
- I love how the soil pictures our hearts.
- And I love how the good soil pictures the seed being buried, protected, and safe in a person's heart.
 - This is what good soil does: it keeps the seed in it.
 - A good and noble heart holds God's Word in it.

This idea of keeping God's Word in our hearts is a theme in Scripture...

- **Deut 6:6** These words which I command you today shall be **IN YOUR HEART**.
- **Job 22:22** Receive...instruction from His mouth, and lay up His words **IN YOUR HEART**.
- **Psa 37:31** The law of his God *is* **IN HIS HEART**.
- **Psa 40:8** I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law *IS* **WITHIN MY HEART.**"

Most famously, what did David say he did w/ God's Word?

Psa 119:11 Your word I have **HIDDEN IN MY HEART**, that I might not sin against You.

So what exactly does it mean to have God's Word hidden – or kept – in our hearts?

- It means you take God's Word w/ you...
- It's influencing you...
- You think on it...
- You use it when you face decisions...
- You use it to direct your life.

And the next question is **HOW** can you keep God's Word in your heart?

This could be long, but I want to give you one piece of advice for your daily bible reading...

I think we've all read the Bible, stood up, and then said, "What did I just read?"

I think this often takes place for one of two reasons:

1. We tried to read too fast.
2. We tried to read too much.

I'd say it would be better for you to read five verses that you take even one thing from to keep in your heart than three chapters that you don't remember at all.

If you're going to meditate on God's Word and it's going to be planted in your heart, you're going to have to slow down and really think about – and even pray about – what you're reading.

Also, sometimes it would be best if we read a passage a few times, and I don't mean a few times in one sitting, I mean maybe a few days in a row!

As a personal example, we've been reading through Matthew as a family, but we stopped to talk about discernment.

- We ended up in Hebrews 5 reading the same passage for a number of mornings.
- So slow down when you're reading. Try to understand what you're reading.
- You can almost take your mind back to Jesus' words in **verse 8** "**He who has ears to hear, let him hear!**" – Try to hear what God wants to say to you through His Word.

Now if we go back to the progression in **verse 15**:

1. First, people **hear the word**.
2. Second, people **keep the word**.

Then it says they **bear fruit**. It's not enough to simply hear God's Word: it must produce fruit in our lives.

And this brings us to the next part of Lesson 5...

LESSON 5: THE SEED ON GOOD GROUND PICTURES SALVATION AND (PART II) IT PRODUCES FRUIT.

In **Col 1:5-6** Paul said **The word of the truth of the gospel** (or the seed)...**has come to you...and IS BRINGING FORTH FRUIT.**

This is what the seed – or Word of God – does in the lives of those who have embraced it: produce fruit.

In one of our recent Sunday School classes we discussed that fruit is one of the strongest proofs of salvation. Jesus made this point:

- **Matt 7:19** Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.
- **John 15:5** I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit.

It doesn't come out in Luke, but in Matthew's account it's clear not everyone produces the same amount of fruit. Listen to this verse from the parallel account...

Matt 13:8 Others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

So here are two things we can say:

- Not all believers will produce the SAME amount of fruit.
- But all believers will produce at least SOME fruit.

Next, I want you to notice the word **patience**. It says **bear fruit with patience**.

If you've gardened before, you know this is a perfect word to use, b/c **patience** is one thing you need. You plant the seed and then you wait.

I really like this idea if we compare it w/ the Word of God...

When the Word is planted in a heart, it takes time; it requires patience:

- We have our family bible studies, and it would be wonderful if we discussed things in the morning and later that day we saw the fruit in our children's lives. Sometimes it's like that...but often we have to wait to see it.
- We hear sermons and it would be wonderful if we walked out of the church changed people, but often it takes time for God's Word to work in our hearts.

But let me tell you something important...

When **verse 15** mentions the word **patience**, we need to understand it's much more than just waiting...

Waiting is very passive. For example:

- We wait at stoplights...
- We wait in line at the store...
- We wait in the waiting room...

If we could stop waiting in these situations, we would. So we're waiting, but it's not intentional. We have no choice.

But that's not how we should think of the word **patience** in **verse 15**. I want to encourage you to see the word **patience** and think of **endurance** or **perseverance**, which is how it's translated in some bibles:

- And enduring or persevering isn't something passive.
- It's not something you're forced to do.
- It's something you choose to do.
- You're deciding not to quit or give up.

And this brings us to the next part of Lesson 5...

LESSON 5: THE SEED ON GOOD GROUND PICTURES SALVATION AND (PART III) IT PERSEVERES.

Let me get you to think about something...

Remember the second, third, and fourth soils all looked the same at first. They all looked like believers! Let me show you some phrases that make this point:

- With the second soil in **verse 6** it says **as soon as it sprang up**.
- With the third soil in **verse 7** it says **sprang up with it**.
- With the fourth soil in **verse 8** it says **sprang up**.

Now looking at the explanation...

- With the second soil in **verse 12** it says **the ones who hear**.
- With the third soil in **verse 13** it says **when they hear, receive the word with joy...who believe for a while**.
- With the fourth soil in **verse 14** it says **when they have heard**.

So you see the second, third, and fourth soils all looked the same:

- You've got the plant springing up, hearing, and receiving the word with joy.
- All three of these soils looked like believers, at least at first!

But here's the question...

Did any of the plants last? No. They were killed by:

- Trials and persecution...
- Cares, riches, and pleasure...

It meant nothing without perseverance:

- "Faith" and "hearing" are only valuable if those who believe and hear persevere and bring forth fruit.
- The faith that leads to salvation is a faith that perseveres.

Listen to what Jesus said...

Luke 21:19 By your patience – or perseverance – possess your souls.

Jesus is saying enduring – or persevering – is one of the ways to demonstrate you're saved.

Now that we've covered the last soil, I want to ask you to get some elevation on the entire parable, so I can give you two concluding lessons.

First, there's only one-out-of-four soils that actually receive the Word of God and come to salvation, so here's one question we might consider...

LESSON 6: IS THE RATIO BETTER THAN ONE FOURTH TODAY?

With this parable Jesus clearly is NOT describing an age of great harvest. He's describing an age in which the majority reject the Gospel.

It made me wonder if the parable demonstrates a ratio of how many people hear the Word of God and are saved?

We live in a time in history when there has never been so much availability to good, solid teaching. It wasn't that long ago you'd have to travel for hours over some number of miles if you wanted to hear a great preacher. Now you can listen to the world's greatest preachers in your home or your car.

When you consider how much great teaching goes on weekly, monthly, and yearly, you can start to wonder:

- Why aren't more people saved?
- Why don't we see more lives changed?
- Why doesn't the Word look more powerful or successful?

In other words: all this seed is going out, why is there such a small harvest?

This parable answers that question!

- The fault doesn't lie in the seed. The fault lies w/ the soil.
- The problem isn't w/ God's Word. The problem is w/ man's heart.

Many people have poor hearts:

- There are lots of hearts like the first soil that are stubborn and rebellious.
- There are lots of hearts like the second soil that have shallow faith; when trials or persecution come, the faith disappears.
- There are lots of hearts like the third soil; the worries, love for riches, and pursuit of pleasure choke God out of their lives.

It's shocking to think that three fourths of the soils don't produce fruit. I don't know if this means 75% of people who hear the Gospel don't get saved, but maybe that's the case. Maybe the statistics aren't any better in real life than they look in this parable.

At one point this week I was thinking, "The people who don't receive God's Word must be those OUTSIDE the church, and of course only one fourth of those people would respond well to the Gospel."

But then I thought:

- The ones outside the church would probably be the first soil; these are the people who look hostile to God's Word.
- The second and third soils receive the Word enthusiastically. More than likely this would be people IN the church.

Obviously this can seem fairly discouraging, but I do think there's one thing that should encourage us and it's this...

When we share the Gospel – when we sow the seed you might say – and people don't respond well, you don't have to take that personally. It's a reflection of that person's heart, and not a reflection of your personal evangelism.

You might keep in mind that most of the prophets looked terribly unsuccessful.

- It definitely wasn't a reflection of them.
- They were great men.
- It was a reflection of the hearts of the people who heard the word of God.

Interestingly, who looks like the MOST successful OT prophet? Jonah!

He looked like the worst sower in history, but he was dealing w/ people who had good and receptive hearts, so they responded well.

So this does something else...here's another application from this parable...

We're also discouraged from being prideful!

When someone responds well to the Word of God, don't think it's b/c of you. It's not b/c...

- You're such a great evangelist...
- Or you're such a great teacher...

Instead, it's a reflection of that person's heart.

Listen to Paul – arguably the greatest evangelist and teacher ever – explain the situation...

1 Cor 3:5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, BUT GOD GAVE THE INCREASE. ⁷So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

Twice we're told God gave the **increase**. We can't take credit for what God does in a person's heart; we should never be prideful about our great sowing ability.

When people respond well, who knows how long God had been preparing their hearts to receive what you said?

The second thing I'd like to share w/ you relates to your parenting...

If you're a parent here's what you might be wondering:

- I wonder what soil my children have?
- Maybe there's one child in particular that you really wonder about...

And this brings us to our last lesson...

LESSON 7: IT'S HARD TO TELL WHICH SOIL CHILDREN HAVE.

Remember the second and third soils looked good...at first.

This can often be the case w/ children growing up in Christian homes:

- They want to please their parents...
- They're largely obedient and compliant...
- They can look good outwardly...

So it's hard to tell what's going on inwardly.

To know which soil your children have, you have to wait for your children to be exposed to everything we've discussed:

- You have to see your child exposed to **trials and persecution**...
- You have to see your child exposed to **cares, riches, and pleasure of this life**...

To see if your child has the second, third, or fourth soil.

I don't want to pry too much into your parenting or evangelism, but this is one reason I'd encourage you to be careful w/ "the sinner's prayer":

- If your children are showing an interest in following Christ, that's wonderful.
- Praying with your children that they follow Christ throughout their lives is wonderful.
- Telling your children IF they repent and put their faith in Christ is also wonderful.

But guaranteeing your children they're saved b/c they repeated some words after you is very risky:

- Perhaps your children have the fourth soil, and the seed of God's Word has taken root in their hearts and is beginning to produce a crop.
- Perhaps they're saved and they're going to follow the Lord the rest of their lives.
- But the other possibility is your children have the second or third soil and they look like they're receiving the seed...but they haven't yet.

You could be doing terrible damage to your children if you guarantee them they're saved when they aren't.

John MacArthur said, *"The gospel Jesus proclaimed was a call to discipleship, a call to follow Him in submissive obedience, not just a plea to pray a prayer...It was an offer of eternal life and forgiveness for repentant sinners...It put sinners on notice that they must turn from sin and embrace God's righteousness. It was in every sense good news, yet it was anything but easy-believism."*

We don't want to teach our children easy-believism, so let me give you two encouragements:

1. First, teach your children the Gospel. Teach them about repentance and genuine faith.
2. Second, pray that their hearts would have good soil that receives the Word of God down deep and produces a great crop.

But I would discourage you from guaranteeing your children are saved b/c they recited some words.

And when we pray for our children like this, it should challenge all of us to examine our hearts and consider the soil that characterizes our lives.

So let's conclude this parable w/ me asking this question...

Which of the four soils do you have?

1. Are you like the first soil: do you sit here with a hard heart?
 - a. Has your life been characterized by stubbornness and rebellion to Scripture?
 - b. Would those closest to you describe you as a stubborn and rebellious person who seems resistant to the Word of God?
2. Are you more like the second soil? You have a shallow faith.

- a. Was there a time when you were excited about God?
 - b. You couldn't get enough of church?
 - c. But now, not so much. Now you're fairly lukewarm. God is reserved for Sundays only.
3. What about the third soil?
- a. Are there things in your life that choke God out and keep you from growing?
 - b. Is your life consumed with anxieties, pursuit of riches, or the pleasures of this life?

Hopefully, more than one fourth of you would say you have the fourth soil. Praise God! You aren't perfect but you are growing! You are enduring! You are producing fruit! You are keeping God's Word in your heart! All of this is by His grace and gives Him glory and honor. Praise Him for that.

But if this isn't your heart, repent! Come see myself or Pastor Doug. We would consider it a privilege to be able to talk w/ you and pray w/ you.

Let's pray.