



# THE PARABLES OF JESUS

## THE SOWER

### **Before Life Group**

Read [Mark 4:1-20](#)

For a largely agrarian society, a message of sowing and reaping seed would be immediately understood. As Jesus taught the people while he stood on the lake, he spoke to them the profound mysteries of an eternal and brilliant Kingdom. Yet he did so with the language that the people would understand. The mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven were being revealed to mankind and the word of God was spreading far and wide. This message became the focal point for what Jesus was intending to communicate.

He told them a parable of a farmer who sought to spread seed in various places and various conditions of soil. Culminating in the good soil, prepared to receive the word of God, the seed is able to germinate and grow beyond what it was at first. As for our hearts, there are conditions in which we are best able to receive the word of God that have nothing to do with the word of God. Furthermore, there is a spiritual enemy and a world that seeks to rob mankind of the joy of coming to an understanding of the fullness of God.

Yet it is worth noting that the seed is spread to all of the soil. As the farmer is delivering the seed to the various soils, there is no type that is neglected or left out. The same seed is given to the hard soil, the rocky soil, the thorny soil, and the good soil. The conditions of a person's willingness to receive the word of God is ultimately the measure of whether or not that person will be fruitful in his or her faith. The word of God has the power to multiply life inside of a person.

### **Hard Soil**

"Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them." ([Mark 4:15 NIV](#)) For some people the Gospel never takes root merely because it is not received. Whether it is a distraction, a preconceived notion, or an unwillingness to listen, the Gospel falls on deaf ear. Thus, any attempts are immediately snatched up by the devil, who seeks to take away the life-changing power of the word of God.

Spiritual distractions tend to be simpler than we make them out to be in our head. For the word of God to fall on hard soil means solely that it is not received. We may try and make these out to be huge spiritual distractions that throw us colossally off course, but this is rarely the case. Doubts are subtle things that often slip undetected under the radar. Like the serpent in the garden, oftentimes the subtlety of "Did God really say..." creeps deep into our souls and hardens our heart, therefore making it difficult to receive God's word.

Hard soil must be sufficiently tilled and broken up in order for things to take root. The hardness is not with the seed but rather with the recipient of the seed. Thus, it is we who need to be presented before God to loosen our hearts to hear the truth of God's word. When we have doubts, as all of us most certainly will, we approach God directly and kneel before Him. When there are distractions, we surrender the distractions to God and prioritize our day around hearing from God. Though other things may come up, our focus remains on the ultimate power of the word of God.

## Rocky Soil

"Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away" ([Mark 4:16-17 NIV](#)). Faith in Jesus Christ, while an act in the heart and soul of a person, is intended to be lived out for the world to see. Our lives will serve as a testament to the glory of God for all the world to see. Yet, our theology must make room for persecution to occur as a direct result of our faith. Not everything we do will be easy and not everything we do will be looked on favorably. The flesh and the world treats Christianity as an allergy incompatible with the values it holds dear. The two are incompatible and cannot peacefully exist with one another. There will be times of trial that are in no means a sign that your faith is broken.

We cannot forget that the God who is over the peace is the same God who reigns during the storm. Difficulties and persecution do not negate the presence of God. Nor are these things that a Christian will not experience. The bible promises the opposite. Our faith on full display will result in persecution. In choosing to stand out and choose a lifestyle different than the world, we become an enemy of the world. When this occurs, we cannot fall into dismay. The strength of our message comes from our understanding that Jesus Christ has already secured the victory. There is no persecution, no pain, no torture or trial that can sufficiently rob Jesus Christ of the victory. Victory has already been accomplished and the power of death itself no longer holds any reign over those who remain in Christ Jesus.

## Thorny Soil

"Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful" ([Mark 4:18-19 NIV](#)). The thorny soil represents a person's wish and desire for the things of this world. Jesus singles out the desire for wealth above the others as a primary worry that chokes out the power of the word. Ultimately, the heart cannot pursue two contradicting things. The power of the word and selfish ambition cannot coexist with one another and only one can survive the encounter.

At our core as people, our fleshly nature desires personal growth and advancement at the expense of our faith and spiritual well-being. The pursuit of wealth and other desires stems from the thought of taking our own well-being into our own hands. Yet, for all of our desire to produce our own salvation, our abilities amount only to self-indulgences. Money will one day be spent. Fame and fortune will fade. At the end of our lives when we face death, everything we amass for ourselves will be unable to join us.

Thorns must be removed. Like weeding a garden, the thorns must be forcibly removed from the heart of the believer. There is no gradual weening off that will be effective and no amount of tolerance that is acceptable. God wants our full heart, not our divided heart. When we hold back from God, the thorns choke our desire for a real and true relationship that extends into eternity. We trade the everlasting for the temporary. Money



and personal gain may be appealing, but there is a greater gift that God desires to give to all who would receive him: abundant life.

## Good Soil

“Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.” ([Mark 4:20 NIV](#)) Out of a tiny seed springs immense growth when it is allowed to properly develop. The moment you devote your lives to God by the power of the Gospel—this is the start of your spiritual growth. Yet many treat it as if it is the end. Biblically speaking, the sowing of the seed is the first point where we learn to grow closer in our relationship to Christ. It is a constant development where a person becomes more and more like Jesus Christ by being united with Him. This is the multiplication and fruit that comes from that relationship. Jesus comes alive in us and brings us to our intended creation. We were designed for our fullness of purpose to be fulfilled in a relationship and communion with God.

When the seed comes alive in a heart prepared to receive the word of God, the results are the difference between merely being alive and truly living. In one we exist simply until the end, seeking our own vain existence. In the other we live beyond ourselves and for something larger and greater than we could ever imagine. Our lives are filled with not only purpose, but with a sense of well being. We bask in the eternal love of God and understand our place in the world. Everything rises and falls on the word of God’s love being implanted deep in our soul.

We prepare our hearts by allowing God full access to everything we are. Remember, Jesus Christ is the farmer who sows the seed and is the farmer who tends to the field. Our job is to allow the Spirit of God to move within us. Where there is bitterness and hardness, we allow the Spirit to minister to us and ease our pain, softening our hearts. Where there are rocks and shallowness, we open ourselves up to the deep vulnerable places of our lives, giving the Spirit permission to handle even the most sacred of places. Finally, where there are thorns, we lay them before the Spirit, asking God to not only have His way in us, but also to rid our idols of self-indulgence. The Father sows the word, which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the Spirit of God prepares our hearts to receive it. In doing so, the richness of our lives is multiplied, not with money, but with the everlasting security of salvation in Jesus Christ.

## Discussion Questions

Read [Mark 4:1-20](#)

1. Of the three types of soil first mentioned, which would you say is the one you personally struggle with the most? Why is this particular issue one that causes temptation or struggle?
2. What are some of the spiritual distractions that you face on a daily basis?
3. How can we situate our lives to growing spiritually and allow the word of God to implant in our hearts?
4. In what ways does the world look to steal the joy of the Gospel? How does Jesus bring joy in the midst of difficult times and persecution?
5. Why do we endure the persecution that the world has to offer? How does the persecution of the world stack up against the love of God?
6. What are some of the things in your life that are the thorns that choke out the growth of the word of God?



7. Why is it important to understand the proper position of wealth? How can pursuing wealth and other accomplishments over our spiritual well-being be detrimental to our growth.
8. How does Jesus describe the effects of having a heart ready to receive the word of God? What is the effect of hearing the word of God?
9. What are some of the ways we can prepare our heart to receive the word of God and ensure our hearts are good soil? How do we help prepare the hearts of others as we share the Gospel with those around us?

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**About the Author.**

*Pastor Daniel Burton lives in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida. In May 2015, Daniel graduated from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary with his Master of Divinity. It was here that he began to explore his passion for Theology and deeper exploration of the word of God. Daniel believes that, at its core, Theology should be fun. Check out more of his work at <http://thegospeloutpost.com>*

