

Good morning brothers and sisters in Christ, and friends,

This is only part one of the study on the good soils. God has put much more on my heart that is inspiring and challenging me and I believe will inspire and challenge you. So, I plan to keep digging into this and writing down (and filling out) more on this - what it means in the everyday details of our lives and how to put it more into practice. But, for now, I'll have to leave it at this. ~ Thanks so much for your prayers - this little ministry would not be as effective or alive without your prayers, so thank you. Those of us who know Christ are one body and I thank you for your part in my life, and pray that I continue to grow and continue to be a helpful part of your life. ttfn, your bro, SH

Good afternoon brothers, sisters and friends :)

So, having gotten a little more a glimpse on what it takes to send our roots deep ~ or at least the processes and patterns to do so, let's look at the last 3 soils and the passages about them to see if we can get a better grasp on this :)

“But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Matthew 13:8-9)

“But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.” (Mark 4:8)

“But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.” (Luke 8:8)

Okay, so all 3 of those parallel passages say about the same thing. I would like to note a couple of small details.

The reversal of order between Matthew 13 and Mark 4 probably highlights that He doesn't condemn those who don't produce as much, but in both passages God sets the bar high - that ought to really catch our attention. Do we actively exclude everything from our lives that distract us from Christ, even for a moment? What about our time - is every moment of our day spent only on things that we know please Him? If not - why not? And a follow-up question - what is our plan to correct that? :) Food for thoughts and for quality intentional-meditating on God's Word.

Another note here - did you notice that Luke only mentions 1 soil - 100 times what was sown **“hundredfold”**. I think that emphasizes, to me, the point that I was seeing the two above it. This is a little detail, but by no means insignificant - to God, and should not be to us. Let me restate that to make the point clearer - your active spiritual growth in every area of your life closer to Him is the most important - not secondary, but the most important thing in your life - to Him. How about to you?

Remember these 3 passages and let's repeat it to ourselves and others so that it becomes not just words to us, but so much a part of our thinking every single day that every day we wake up with this focus.

“Jesus said to him, ‘‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment...’’
(Matthew 22:37-38)

“‘And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment.”
(Mark 12:30)

“So he answered and said, ‘ ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind’...”
(Luke 10:27))

Repetition is not for God's sake, but for ours. Why? Because we too often overlook what is valuable, preferring what is comfortable to our selfish nature, and choose paths of rebellion, only choosing obedience after we've learn the lessons - through pain - to embrace what is good and to abhor what is good and right. Same here. And, I think it's important to add to that last thought that when we actually love God will of our being, it excludes anything else from taking its place in our thoughts, actions, words and motivations. So a good application question for all of us to consider is this - Is pleasing and serving Jesus the main thing we think about and the reason we get up in the morning? If not, why not? And if some pleasure and/or person competes with it, then are we really loving Him with our whole being or just giving Him the leftovers? One is a clear proof of salvation, the other is a huge question if we have confirmed and initiated that marriage-type covenant with Christ.

And, if I were teaching this in person, I would leave a pause here to let this sink into my mind better, and hopefully in yours too. But since this is ink and paper, please do that for yourself - spend just a couple of minutes re-reading those verses above - they are the core of Jewish Biblical thought, teaching and lifestyle - how about yours and mine? Let's grow in making this our only passion and desire - me too. You in? :)

“But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”
(Matthew 13:16-17)

Think about that for minute with me - do you realize that we have the complete Bible, when honorable men and women like Abraham, Moses, and David and Deborah, Ruth, and Esther only had small parts of the Scriptures and some teachings passed

down through the generations? We are absolutely blessed! But, with much blessing comes much responsibility - we have so much more access to truth as well as clear helpful teaching (from some) to help us understand His Word and truth and we will have less excuse for ignoring what we do hear and do know of God's Word. A little sobering thought... Let's keep growing everyday in our hunger for His Word and our diligence in applying it, so that we have less to cry about when we see Him. :)

Okay, now, let's look at Jesus' explanation, and see what we can learn from the little nuances and differences that fill in the bigger picture.

“But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” (Matthew 13:23)

“But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.” (Mark 4 :20)

“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.” (Luke 8:15)

Okay, so let's note a few key words here. In Matthew 13:23, Jesus said that all 3 good soils hear the Word and (at some level) apply it and put it into action in their lives. There is a qualitative difference in their **“understanding”**. It's more like a drive to understand rather than a passive desire - it's more like: 'Father, I want to understand this and obey it. Please, even if it's painful, show me what this means and how I can obey it.' --- instead of: 'I think I know what this means, but I don't really like that, so I'll just say I'm not sure...' ~ it's the difference between spiritual growth and no growth. It's the difference between good fruit and bad fruit. And, often enough in this country, it's the difference between salvation and no salvation.

Mark 4:20 really highlights the above point: **“hear the word, accept it and bear fruit”** ~ all 3 verbs there (hear, accept, and bear/produce) are intentional verbs. We are either living in intentional obedience, or we are trying to hide the fact that we are living in intentional rebellion - God knows the difference way better than those around us. So, if we trying to fool someone, the changes are very good we're only deceiving one person - us. So, let's just keep making sure we aren't deceiving ourselves - the worst kind of deceiving, because very few can identify it and help us out of it.

I would also like that producing spiritual fruit - obedience, growth in maturity - is the most important thing implied here. Amount is a key part, but just making sure that there is growth is the starting spot. Now, digging deeper - the amount of fruit we are showing is very important, as well. But, keep in mind here - God is not and will not compare any of us and the amount of spiritual fruit our life shows to anyone else. If

you see someone that is more fruitful than you, great! Cheer them on - they need it too! But, at the same time, don't stop trying to aim higher - raise your bar. Let them challenge you and be quick to destroy the viper of jealousy - as soon as possible, making sure that you are always working swiftly to cut off, reject, say 'no' to, and become dead to that. But, instead, find those who show more maturity than you, and stick close to them (as much as God allows). It may be uncomfortable at times, but the longer we stick with them and the more we will gain spiritual insights from them, the more you quickly we will be able to grow in spiritual maturity, the fear of the Lord, and sharpen our spiritual eyesight so we can grow to become effective, faithful, disciplined, humble, passionate, and bold yet gracious - Ambassadors for Christ. We must always be seeking to grow in maturity to the point where our actions, words and motivations are pure, so that we are the most useful vessels so that Christ can most effectively plead through us with those around us: **"Be reconciled to God."** (2nd Cor. 5:20)

And adding to this - Luke 8:15, includes more highlights: **"having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience."**

I don't have time today to break that down further, but the more you study each word there, the more rich and pure your maturity will show.

Let me conclude this part with this explanation:

The level of your and my maturity can be assessed by to what extent we are actively obeying and applying the truth of God's Word that we do know into our lives - today. Please, allow me to say that again, because this teaching is vital for us to not only understand how to follow Christ, but also to be able to grow daily. - Our level of maturity is the amount and quality of truth that we put into practice in our everyday lives. And as we grow in understanding on it, we can and will be able to track our measure of spiritual growth in each area of our lives, every day. But, if this subject is new for you, then you may only be able to track it once a year or twice a year, etc. But, either way, aiming higher and for more purity and more obedience is better for you and me - both here and when we see Him one day. For, we all need to keep growing daily so we have as few as possible regrets then (including genuinely confessing when we are wrong to God, and those involved, as necessary).

Let's look at this cycle of putting His Word and truth into action in our lives - from another angle. Our lifestyle and the things, pleasures, activities, and patterns that we follow actually show what kind of worldview we have - meaning, who we believe God to be. As we grow in maturity is also shown by how quick we are to identify a spiritual danger and move away from it, and/or gently warn others to stay away from it. It's a process that takes much effort and a consistent, patient persistence. And, it is identify-able - those who are actively working on it, it shows in God's blessing on them and in the extra wisdom they receive from God, because they are being diligent in their spiritual growth. Those who do not have it, because they've become

comfortable where they are - refusing to grow further, it also shows in the numerous little hard things, bumps, and confusion. - Why? Because they are not valuing and obeying the truths that they do know and God is pressing them to obey, right now. If you find yourself in the second category, just pick up where you left off, and become quicker at being willing to let go of and throw away out of your life what God is showing you is hurting you spiritual - somehow taking action against that thorny weed and/or influence - throwing it away (even burning it) so that it stops choking you and stopping your progress, so you will not have to be ashamed as much for being slow to give up that pet sin and/or comfortable pet false teaching. (I'm staying broad for a reason - you need to pray over what I'm teaching here and apply it to your life for only you know exactly what is tripping you up, day-in and day-out. So do so - be diligent to apply this to your life, even right now is a great time to stop and pray about it.)

As we sharpen our spiritual eyesight in recognizing where we are day-by-day, hour-by-hour, moment-by-moment - we will also, in time, be able to use that very same spiritual eyesight to help others to either honestly identify where they are and/or help them grow from there by reminding them of verses they may not remember at the time, but they need to dig into more. I'll want to come back to this point, but I just wanted us to keep it in mind and let it start re-shaping our lifestyle and mindset, throughout our days.

And, btw, a key verse to keep in mind on this, even to hide in our hearts, is found in 1st Timothy 4: **“Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”** (1st Timothy 4:15-16)

It may not be comfortable, but it certainly doesn't hurt us to consider about ourselves (and others we want to help) that if we aren't growing, we might be a 2nd or 3rd soil and have not yet entered into the marriage covenant relationship with Christ - only sticking around for what brings us pleasure. I have some experience in that for that's where I was until right around 18 yrs old. So, honest double-checking ourselves does not hurt us, and may save us massive grief when we see Him. With that said, let's all take a few minutes (and/or more) to double-check ourselves. You may use these thought questions, you may not, but I put them out there to help you - if you want.

> Do I love and desire to spend more time in God's Word than I did a year ago, or do I desire it less? If less, then what has taken that time and that place in my life? After identifying it, how do I remove it from my life or limit that distraction, motivation, or person - so much that they/it has almost no influence in my life anymore.

> Do I pray more than I did a year ago, or less? If less, why? If more, why, and how can I include it more? And, is my motivation pure in praying, or am I seeing a pattern of selfish prayers?

> Am I growing in love for people who hurt me, or am I holding onto bitterness against them? Am I only setting up safer patterns and disciplines, or am I silently seeking revenge against them? *** (safe patterns and disciplines are good, holding onto anger against them is not)

> Is my communication with people moving more toward 'fun' conversations or more toward spiritual conversations?

*** I know you can fill in a lot more that apply directly to your life, that just gives you a good several to start with.

Till next time, let's seek to intentionally grow today. ~ your brother/friend, SH