

Part 3 in our study on the parable of the soils.

Okay, now after our brief detour through 2nd Timothy (which I thought was quite refreshing!), I'd like to look at more Jesus' explanation of the 4th, 5th and 6th soils, and see what we can learn from the little nuances and differences that fill in the bigger picture.

First the comparisons of the parable:

“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”** that modifies the quantity of their response. It's more like the ones who are more productive have more of a drive to understand rather than a passive desire. As I understand it, those who are more spiritually productive have more a mindset like: 'Father, I want to understand this and obey it. Please, even if it's painful, show me this and teach me what this means and how I can obey it.' --- instead of: 'I think I know what this means, and I'm sort of curious, but it sounds like too much pressure, and I'm not really sure I want to figure it out, and I'm not really interested anyway. I've got other things I want to do. I'll maybe consider studying it and trying to figure out what it means someday soon...' ~ it's the difference between spiritual growth and no growth. Anyone ever heard of the joke about doing something 'Mañana'? Tomorrow never comes. Either we are intentionally growing today or we are not. I heard one person say that Hell is full of people with good intentions - let's make sure that our epitaph on our tombstone was that we had the intention to growing in doing what was right and in effectively serving our Lord and Master Jesus, but we never got around to it. Let us, today, be intentional about growing, spending time in His Word and taking in good, literal teaching of His Word, and working to remove what is hindering us from spending time in His Word and obeying and serving Him. 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.

Okay, another note of words to note: Mark 4:20 really highlights the above point we were just looking at: the good soils - **“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 do.

So, if we trying to fool someone, the chances are very good that 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.

“Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.” (1st Timothy 4:15) ~ This probably needs to become a memory verse for each of us, me too.

Third note - I would also like to note that producing spiritual fruit - obedience, growth in maturity - is the most important thing implied here in this 3 passages. Amount is a key part, but just making sure that there is growth is the focal point.

Fourth note - 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 as well. Let them challenge you and be quick to destroy the vipers of jealousy and pride - 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). I personally think I'm more in the 60-fold category (maybe just short of it), so I too am aiming to grow in becoming faithful with what I know and in every detail of how I live. Hanging out with those who are spiritually standing and walking higher than us 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 completely 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, because there is more richness I want to get to, but the more you and I study each word there, the more rich and pure your maturity will show. :)

Okay before we move on, let's look try to get a better grasp on this:

The level of your and my maturity can be assessed by measuring 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 lives - everyday. And as we grow in understanding on it, we can and will be able to track our quality 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. If that's where you currently find yourself, great! But, I urge you not to stop there - **aiming higher** and for more purity and more obedience is better for you and me - both here and when we see Him one day. I personally try to check every day and/or every week to make sure I'm growing, except when things get really, really busy, then it's more like a couple of times a month. Whatever you and I can do to learn to check ourselves will help us to grow better. We shouldn't stress out when we see ourselves not growing as fast at times or think too highly of ourselves when we are really doing well - just work to maintain the perspective: 'Am I learning and growing closer to God today? Did I learn and grow closer to God in 'such and such' area yesterday?...' etc.

I think in this country many of us forget that spiritual growth takes investment, and the amount we get out of it, will show in the amount of effort we are actively putting into it. In this society, many people spend time planning what career they want to be doing in 10 years, getting a debt paid down in several years, losing weight, exercising more, eating healthy... etc ~ Many of those are good things, but only as long as we make sure that our spiritual growth closer to God is the priority of our lives, not something on the list. Every day, Jesus is either Lord of all we are doing, or He is not Lord at all - because we are not intentionally making sure we are pleasing Him in the details. I know that all of us want to aim high and want to be welcomed into God's glorious Heavenly kingdom, so 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). Maintaining a clear conscience and a blameless testimony are 'musts' not hopefuls. As you and I work to double-check out daily schedule, let's keep making sure that our focus is on pleasing Christ first and rearranging or eliminating anything that is taking our focus away from pleasing Christ. This process takes time, energy, planning, discipline, enthusiasm and motivation and will be well worth every second of time and ounce of energy invested. Only when we are in Heaven will see clearly how very important it is to stay focused on obeying and serving Him, and not getting entangled by busywork and in Satan's distractions. ~ food for thought on our investments :)

Okay, now, I'd like to 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 and how we would describe Him. As we grow in maturity, our worldview 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, as well as their ability to more quickly assess

something as right or wrong, helpful or harmful, truth or error. And those who show more discernment show that they are being diligent in their spiritual growth. Those who do not have that ability (or show a lack of it), from my experience with seeing myself and talking with many it's because of 1 of 3 details:

>> they are spiritually young, but improving on it every day

>> they love fantasy and/or listening to false comfortable teaching that is rearranging all of their definitions and making it harder for them to identify what's hurting them.

Or

>>> it's because they've become too comfortable where they are - refusing to grow further.

God easily knows how to help all 3 categories (and I'm sure we can see ourselves either in or having been in all 3 of those. All God is looking for is an inner drive to grow and an honesty to let go of things that our selfish nature likes and to learn to embrace things that are good for us, but we don't enjoy (at that moment). God can take someone who wants to learn and teach them in the numerous little hard things, bumps, and confusion. I know - that's what He does for me too.

For those who find themselves 'in a rut' spiritually, it's most often because they are not valuing and obeying the truths that they do know and God is pressing them to obey, right now. So, if you find yourself 'in a rut', just pick up where you left off. Go back to your last interaction with God and get busy obeying what He was teaching you. Will it mean change? Yep, most often. But, as long as it's a change that draws us closer to God, then it's okay. Remember, Satan is the one who wants us to be comfortable here and is deceptive enough not to remind us that if we do, we'll be uncomfortable or have suffered losses that will come out in Heaven. However, God is in the business of us actively growing - intentionally and daily. So, becoming quicker at being willing to let go of and throw away out of our lives what God is showing you is hurting you spiritual is how to 'pick up where we left off' and something we all have to do, for me, sometimes several times a day. Those who are in the 'good, productive soil category' are the ones who are actively taking action against that thorny weed and/or influence and stones that want to stop them from growing closer to God. How? By throwing 'it' away (even burning it) - working to remove whatever that thing is that is stopping and choking us and stopping our progress. And the more we grow in this, the less we will cry and be ashamed when we see Him for being slow to give up that pet sin and/or comfortable pet false teaching, etc. I intentionally tried to stay broad in my references here, for a reason. I expect that you, like me, will 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! Let's be diligent to apply this to your life, even right now is a great time to stop and pray about it. :)

And continuing -

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 and discernment (that we are learning) to help others to either honestly identify where they are and/or help them grow from there by reminding

them of verses that inspire them (and that they may not remember at the time, but that they need to dig into more). I'll want to come back to this point of how we can help those around us more later, but I just wanted us to keep it in mind and let it start re-shaping our lifestyle and mindset, throughout our coming days (and hopefully the rest of our lives).

And, btw, that 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/they aren't growing, we might find that we are a 2nd or 3rd soil and have not yet entered into the marriage covenant relationship with Christ, for many who aren't spiritually growing are only sticking around for what brings them pleasure. I have some experience in that, since 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, and produce abundant spiritual blessing here as well as making us more useful for our Master's use. So, with that said, let's all take a few minutes (and/or more) to honestly 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.

For now, I think I'll leave us there - in that quiet time, meditating on His Word and how to please Him. ~ ttfn, your growing bro, SH

