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Grounders:

Can you recall an experience that has hardened your heart toward God? The event seemed to put an obstacle in your inner being that continually hinders the movement of God in a particular area of your life. Jesus addressed this scenario when He shared the story known as *The Parable of the Sower* (Matt. 13:1-23; cf. Mk. 4:1-20; Lk. 8:4-15). The parable had three points: (1) *The Sower sows the seed*; (2) *three unfruitful soils produce destruction*; and (3) *one fruitful soil produces life*.

The Sower sows the seed (Matt. 13:1-3). The Sower is Christ. The seed is the word of God (Lk. 8:11). This is the expression of God in Christ to each one of us. The soils represent four preparations of the heart—three unfruitful soils which are destructive to the expression of God, one fruitful soil that experiences life. The three destructive soils comprise three differing levels of obstacles.

Two thousand years ago in Palestine, the ground was plowed before seed was sown. In fact, one commonly used tool actually plowed as the seed was sown. Jesus' point was that the Holy Spirit had plowed and continued to plow every heart that heard His message of the kingdom of God. The hearers were responding with one of four preparations of the heart—three unfruitful, one fruitful.

A clue to Jesus' intended meaning lies in the first three words of Matthew's account, "*That same day*" (Matt. 13:1). Jesus had just taught in riddle form that the only way to find oneself holding a one-way ticket south was to reject, or blaspheme, the Holy Spirit's movement in his life (Matt. 12:30-32).

What seed is Christ sowing in your life? Is he prompting you to be, do, or go in a direction that you are resisting?

Three unfruitful soils produce destruction (Matt. 13:4-7; 18-22). Jesus described three unfruitful soils of destruction, each representing a different level of obstacles to receiving the word of God in our lives.

The first soil that received seed was "*along the path*" (Matt. 13:4). This soil was *hard*. It had been beaten down and compacted from the travelers who had walked on it. The result was no germination of the seed because "*The birds came and ate it up*" (Matt. 13:4). In His explanation of the parable, Jesus equated this earthly truth with a spiritual one, "*When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path*" (Matt. 13:18-19).

Because we often hold on to an experience where someone has walked all over us, our hearts become hard, or closed. The result is that we do not even understand what Christ is sowing in our lives, and the evil one snatches away Christ's seed that was sown in our hearts—hearts that were plowed, or prepared, by the Holy Spirit, but hardened and closed by us (Ps. 17:10).

If you have hardened your heart to Christ's seed in a particular of your life, *sow*. *Open* your heart to His Spirit who will plow your heart and sow His seed in you. Then sow that same seed in others, experiencing the fruit that God has for your life—other lives that are fruitful because of Him.



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The second soil that received the seed was “*on rocky places, where it did not have much soil*” (Matt. 13:5). This soil was *shallow*. The result was a quick, but short-lasting germination of the seed, “*It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root*” (Matt. 13:5-6). Jesus equated this earthly truth with the spiritual, “*The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away*” (Matt 13:20-21).

Often times, we will try to apply something that we learn from the Bible, but when it doesn't seem to work and someone mocks us for trying, we quit. The lack of endurance is a result of no root. We tried to forgive, to be wise, to serve, or to repent, but it really wasn't rooted in our hearts to do so.

If you have a rocky place in your heart where you are shallow, *grow*. Allow the Holy Spirit to plow out the rocks and Christ's seed to take root. *Seek* God with all of your heart (Jer. 29:13). Read a book in the Bible that applies to the area of life where you want to grow. If wisdom, read Proverbs; if joy, read Philipians; if obedience, read 1 John.

The third soil that received the seed was “*among the thorns*” (Matt. 13:7). This soil was *thorny*. The result was that the thorns “*grew up and choked the plants*” (Matt. 13:7). Jesus equated this earthly truth with the spiritual, “*The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful*” (Matt. 13:22).

Because of past experiences, we frequently react with a thorny heart. We hold on to “*the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth.*” We worry about everything from how to pay our bills to what our friends think about us. We fall prey to the deceitfulness of wealth. Wealth is not evil, but it can be deceitful because we think that it promises satisfaction when in the end we are left dissatisfied. Mark's account of the same story recorded Jesus describing a thorny heart as one that had “*desires for other things*” (Mk. 4:19). The result is that our attempt to satisfy our desires for other things chokes out the expression of Christ in our hearts and lives.

If you are holding on to a thorny place in your heart where you are choking out the expression of Christ, *let go*. Allow the Holy Spirit to plow out the thorns of worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things. *Let go and return* to Christ with all of your heart (Joel 2:12). Christ's seed will take root, bearing the fruit of changed lives.

One fruitful soil produces life (Matt. 18:8-9, 23). The fourth soil was “*good*” (Matt. 18:9). This soil was *soft*. The result was blessed, “*It produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown*” (Matt. 18:9). Jesus equated this earthly truth with the spiritual as well, “*But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown*” (Matt. 13:23).

A soft heart is open to the seed that Christ sows. Luke's account of the same parable included “*noble*” for the description of a soft, open heart (Lk. 8:15). Notice that



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Jesus gave three characteristics of the soft soil; he: (1) *hears* the word, (2) *understands* the word, and (3) *produces* much fruit—changed lives. If your heart is soft, *go*. *Hear* the expression of Christ. *Understand* His message through the Holy Spirit's discerning. *Produce* the fruit of changed lives that God has in store for you in Christ.

Jesus taught in parables so that regardless of one's heart condition, he would have the opportunity to germinate the seed that that was sown (Matt. 13:10-17). A Rabbi had more secretive teachings that he would share only with those who grew closest to him. Thus, the parables represented a teaching method for all four heart conditions. Jesus said, "*For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them*" (Matt. 13:15). *Otherwise*, better translated, *perhaps*, meant that each of the heart conditions could turn to Christ who would *heal*, or *forgive*, them (cf. Mk. 4:12). If life's experiences have left you with an unfruitful heart, whether *hard*, *shallow*, or *thorny*, in Christ you can receive a *soft*, fruitful one.

Each day during the next month, pray:

The Sower's Prayer

When my heart is hard,

Help me to sow.

Where my heart is shallow,

Help me to grow.

Whatever my heart's thorns,

Help me let go.

The Sower Answers:

Listen to me speak, I knock at your door.

Seek me, find me, I will give you more.

Loosen your grip, return to me, I will restore.

When your heart is open, into your life holy rain I will pour.

Sowing,

Mitch