

WEEKLY DEVOTIONS AT GLENKIRK



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OCTOBER 8 - 12, 2018

MONDAY

Devotional One

Mark 4:4-20

Continuing our devotional series on the *Parable of the Four Soils*, we now focus our attention on seed that falls on good soil. Jesus borrows an image from 1st century Galilean agriculture to teach a spiritual lesson. In those days, farmers scattered seed far and wide before plowing, and that is what the farmer does in Mark 4:4-8. In verse 14, our Lord explains that the seed scattered by the farmer represents the “word,” that is, the Gospel; thus, we have an image of the indiscriminate preaching of God’s Word.

In other words, Jesus sees the Gospel as a message that must be preached to all people. We may not view some people as worthy of hearing God’s Word and others as unworthy of it. Furthermore, we are not to be worried about whether our hearers have hearts that are inclined to respond in faith. God, not us, prepares the hearts of people to receive the Gospel, and He alone can grant faith (1 Corinthians 3:6).

The Parable of the Four Soils is framed by Jesus’ command to listen to Him (Mark 4:3) and His call: “*He who has ears to hear, let him hear*” (v. 9). With this we see the interplay of what theologians have called the outward call and the inner, effectual call of the Gospel. As followers of

Christ, we are called to share His message with others. We also realize, however, that we don't have control over the type of soil they provide. We can be persistent in what God calls us to and pray that the seeds we plant fall on good soil, but we need to trust God with the rest.

So, what happens with the seed planted on good soil? It produces a crop of up to 100 times more than what was planted! It's amazing what God can do in and through us if we prepare our hearts and minds for growth, so let's not forget how important our own soil is. Imagine how much more effective we can be in following Jesus' call to share God's message when others can see the fruit that faith with deep, healthy roots is capable of producing!

QUESTION

Do any of the four types of ground resonate with you? How can you better prepare your soil for what God is trying to teach you?

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for pursuing me. Please cultivate good soil in my mind and heart so that I can continue to grow in You. Give me the courage to respond to Jesus' calling to plant seeds in the lives of those around me.

Devotional Two

Matthew 13:1-17 - Parables & Mysteries

He got into a boat and sat: Jesus sometimes used a boat as His “pulpit.” It gave Him a place to speak away from the press of the crowds, provided good acoustics, and probably created a nice backdrop! “The teacher sat, and the people stood: we should have less sleeping in congregations if this arrangement still prevailed.” (Spurgeon)

Jesus then spoke to the crowd in parables. The idea behind the word *parable* is “to throw alongside of.” It is a story thrown alongside the truth intended to teach. Parables have been called “earthly stories with a heavenly meaning,” according to David Gusik’s commentary on Matthew.

But why did Jesus use parables? In Luke 8:9-10 Jesus explains the purpose of parables. *“Then His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘What does this parable mean?’ And He 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.’”*

In this context, Jesus used parables more like puzzles or riddles. Only those who had the right “key” could understand them. The mystery isn’t something you can figure out. It is something that you would never know unless God revealed it to you. In the Biblical sense, people might know what the mystery is; yet, it is still a mystery because they would not have known unless God revealed it. Jesus revealed the mystery to the disciples. “The seed is the Word of God (Luke 8:11). If you miss the key, you miss the whole parable.” (Gusik)

“*This is why I speak to them in parables: Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand*” (v. 13). In this sense, the parables of Jesus were not illustrations making difficult things clear to all. They presented God’s message so the spiritually sensitive could understand, but the hardened would merely hear a story without heaping up additional condemnation for rejecting God’s Word.

“The same sun that softens the wax hardens the clay; and so the very same Gospel message that humbles the honest heart and leads to repentance may also harden the heart of the dishonest listener and confirm that one in [his/her] path of disobedience.” (Gusik)

QUESTION

How spiritually sensitive would you say you are to God’s Word?

When you hear it, are you typically moved to action?

PRAYER

Lord, may Your Holy Spirit soften our hearts to Your Word today. May You help us to *see*, *hear* and *understand* Your ways. Fill us to overflowing now that we may go into our day as salt and light. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

TUESDAY

Devotional One

Luke 8:4-15

The description of the good soil preserves our hope when we see others reject the Good News or fall away after initially receiving it. Those early Christians to whom Luke wrote may have been deeply troubled by seeing how many had once followed Jesus but then turned back for one reason or another. Yet, Jesus in this parable led them and us to expect this at times and provided a God's-eye view of the difference found in the good soil—*“they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart”* (v. 15). We are not to be surprised, nor is our faith to be shaken, when the most genuine-seeming Christian falls away.

The hope is palpable in this parable. Yet there is also a word of exhortation, a word of warning. The good soil will hold fast to God's Word and *“bear fruit with patience”* (v. 15). The word for *patience* here does not mean passive waiting. It is a word that connotes steadfastness and endurance, holding firm even in the face of trial. It is a word used several times by Paul in Romans (2:7; 5:3-4; 8:25; 15:4-5). It can reflect episodes of overt persecution (2 Thessalonians 1:4) or simply the normal struggle of enduring life in a fallen world (Romans 8:25). The point in the parable is that only those who endure with steadfastness have a share in the kingdom that Jesus announced.

Many have greatly misunderstood this point. Christianity is populated with multitudes who, through one nominal act or another, believe they settled their business with God. But Jesus doesn't offer false comfort in this parable. The good soil perseveres and is fertile. It is fertile because, by God's grace, it has laid hold of Jesus. The warning then leads back to hope, because seeing the fruit of the gospel in our own lives testifies to us of the power of God at work within us. *"As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me"* (John 15:4). Fruit is the distinguishing mark of the good soil. *"By your endurance you will gain your lives"* (Luke 21:19). Hold fast to Jesus Christ, put confidence in nothing else, and you will be fruitful.

QUESTION

Are people seeing the fruit of the Spirit in your life? Ask them!

PRAYER

Lord, help us to stay steadfast, attached to You, the Vine, so that we will hold firm in our faith even in the face of trial. Amen.

Devotional Two

Luke 8:4-15 - The Soil of Our Hearts

Fall is one of our seasons for planting. We gather the plants, flowers or bulbs. Next, we remove any dead plants, debris, leaves or weeds, leaving the soil clean. We add amendments to the soil, making it rich and ready for new plant life. With anticipation, we look forward to lush new color and growth.

The Parable of the Four Soils is about four different types of soil. Spiritually it is about the condition of our hearts and how well we receive the Word of God. *“As he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside ... some fell on rock ... some fell among thorns ... others fell on good ground”* (vv. 5-8).

The seed is the Word of God, and the sower is anyone who communicates the Word. Whenever God’s Word is shared, the results depend on the fertility of the hearer’s heart, according to a sermon by Douglas G. Denton.

Jesus began His parable with “Listen!” and concluded with “Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.” This was not a call for all to listen. Rather, it was a call for those who were spiritually sensitive to take special note. This was especially true in light of the next few verses when Jesus explains the purpose of the parables. (Gusik) The Kingdom of God comes by hearing. Without hearing and listening, we cannot understand the ways of God.

In Timothy Keller’s sermon, “The Sower,” he says that the secret to the kingdom of heaven is the seed (the Bible, the Gospel message, or information) which moves forward by hearing the Truth. The seed comes

in quietly and sprouts up internally, gently, transforming the soil into a garden or something living.

Are you hearing Truth? In our society today of fast-paced sound bites, hearing through our own filters or thinking of what we want to say next instead of listening, we just aren't great at hearing—let alone seeking the truth.

God wants to sprout something purposeful in your life. Let Jesus, your Gardner, begin to clear out from the soil of your heart what hinders you from hearing His Word effectively. Ask for spiritual sensitivity; then see if new growth sprouts up and new fruit is formed. There is nothing like the garden of a healthy Christian life!

QUESTION

How is the fertility of your heart? Does God's Word penetrate your heart? Do you ever feel a passage from Scripture jump off the page and into your heart?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, please remove anything from my life that is hindering me from hearing Your Truth. Help me to *hear* and *understand* with wisdom and discernment. Grow my knowledge of Your kingdom and Your ways. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WEDNESDAY

Devotional One

Mark 4:1-29

“[Jesus said,] ‘Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times.’ Then Jesus said, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear’” (vv. 8-9). When the seed is received, it yields fruit multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundredfold what was sown. Planting in good ground has an amazing return and is a surefire investment. Notice that the seed is the same; however, there is something special about the soil. This soil does not have more; it has less. Less rocks, less thorns, less hardness, less cares, less worries and less distractions; so it has more room for the seed to work and produce.

When Jesus explained this parable, He told us a few things about this type of soil: *“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”* (Matthew 13:23). So the elements to having good soil are hearing the Word and understanding it. Notice that this is the exact opposite of the first type of soil (the seed along the path), where those who hear do not understand, and the seed is quickly stolen from the heart (Matthew 13:19). Understanding is the key to producing in the kingdom.

In Luke's explanation, Jesus gives another element to having good receptive soil, "*But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop*" (Luke 8:15). An essential truth to understand when planting is that the harvest does not happen right away; there is a time element to it.

Jesus explained this in the parable about the growing seed: "*This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain ... As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come*" (Mark 4:26-29). The soil activates the seed and helps it to produce. It takes time and we do not have to understand this process; we only need to know it is working even when we do not yet see visible proof.

QUESTION

Do you believe you are gaining a better understanding of the Parable of the Four Soils as a result of reading the devotions the past four weeks?

PRAYER

Lord, help us to understand Your Word when we read it or hear it.
Amen.

Devotional Two

Matthew 13: 18-23 - Soil Tests, Part 1

The Parable of the Four Soils explained by Jesus represented four responses to the Word of God. Today find out how you rank on the Soil Tests—Part 1. Before you begin, ask God to give you an honest heart, open eyes to see, and ears to hear.

Wayside Soil: This represents those who never really hear the Word with understanding. The Word of God must be understood before it can bear fruit. “Satan is always on the watch to hinder the Word ... He is always afraid to leave the Truth even in hard and dry contact with a mind.” (Spurgeon)

Soil 1 Test: Those listening to the Word with a *Hard Heart*. This is a caution if you listen with intellect only and believe Christianity is only theological. These are the people who have been in contact with the Word and the ways of the Kingdom regularly, but it hasn't made any impact, according to a sermon by Timothy Keller, “The Parable.”

Ask yourself: Have you ever felt like you were “waking up” to the Truth? Was the message ever talking directly to YOU? If not, the Word for you may just be theory. The soil is hard and nothing is going in. (Keller)

Soil in Stony Places: This represents people who hear the Word enthusiastically, but it is short-lived. The seed quickly springs up and then quickly withers and dies.

Soil 2 Test: Those listening to God with a *Shallow Heart*. These listeners receive the Word with joy and excitement and it is emotional. They say, “Christ changed my life,” but beware. These are the people who can’t take the heat of trouble, suffering, or negative peer pressure; soon they fall away. There was an emotional connection to the Word, but it was never fully understood. Trust was never transferred from self to their Savior. There was no conviction of sin and no repentance. (Keller)

“The greatest spiritual crisis comes when a person has to move a little farther on in his faith than the beliefs he has already accepted.”
(Oswald Chambers)

Ask yourself: Do I want a “blesser” or a Savior? Do I need help and relief or salvation?

QUESTION

Do I sometimes allow the Word no room at all in my life?

Do I sometimes have flashes of enthusiasm in receiving the Word that quickly burn out?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, please clear and prepare the soil of my heart to receive Your Word. I will listen, hear and obey. I don’t want to merely listen and so deceive myself. I want to be transformed by You, God. Wake me up to see what I may be missing, by the power of Jesus’ name, Amen.

THURSDAY

Devotional One

Matthew 13:1-23

Jesus' disciples must have wondered why some people heard "the message of the kingdom" and accepted it, but many did not.

This is assumed in the parable: the seed is good. It has all the potential for life and fruitfulness. The variable in the parable is the soils. The variable is our receptiveness to God's Word. When we do not let God's messages in, like a hard surface off which seeds will bounce (the path), absolutely nothing will happen. In fact, a hard and stubborn heart is exactly what the Evil One wants.

When we listen to the Word of God slightly and let it penetrate in only a shallow way (the rocky ground), the effects are superficial and temporary.

"The worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth" (the thorns) is a story told many times over. Someone wants to have a living faith in God, and he/she may even enjoy life for a little while, but it is short-lived against the competition of worries and materialism. We see it in celebrity believers who speak about faith for a while, but then it fades away. Ordinary people experience it all the time. It is what happens when we spend large amounts of time accumulating more material goods. We are free to do that, but then we'll have chosen one master over another.

And then there is the good soil. In times past when my wife and I planted a garden in the spring, the first task was soil preparation. Do it well with rich soil, some peat moss for aeration, and a bit of natural fertilizer; mix it all together, and you can scoop up handfuls of rich-smelling soil. You know the seed is going to love that soil.

So, “living the Bible” is an organic process. It is about a living Word deeply taking root, and eventually we are amazed at the harvest. This will not happen if we view the Bible as merely a book of rules.

Some self-examination is in order here. Are we ready to receive the Word of God like good soil? Or do things like our worry and financial stress compete with the truth of God? And are we guarding against hard hearts which won't receive the truth of God at all?

QUESTION

Are you now ready and willing to receive the Word of God like good soil? Are you letting the Word of God develop deep roots, or are you being shallow with it?

PRAYER

Lord, with Your Spirit open my heart and mind to receive the truth of Your Word and respond in obedience and gratefulness.

Devotional Two

Mark 4:13-20 - Soil Tests, Part 2

As stated in yesterday's devo, the Parable of the Four Soils explained by Jesus represented four responses to the Word of God. Today find out how you rank on Soil Tests—Part 2. Before you begin, ask God to give you an honest heart, open eyes to see, and ears to hear.

Soil Among the Thorns: “As seed falling among the thorns grew, the stalks of grain were soon choked out, so some respond to the Word and grow for a while, but are choked and stopped in their spiritual growth by competition from unspiritual things.” (Gusik)

Soil 3 Test: For those listening to the Word with a *Divided Heart*. They have root and stick around, but don't bear much fruit. They are controlled by the things of the world and are committed to Christ, but He shares control of their lives. They worship Christ and they worship pleasure and things. They are being choked and don't see healing, spiritual growth, transformation or the real power of God in their lives. These are also the people who doubt their own salvation, according to Timothy Keller in his sermon, “The Parable.”

This is the group who may have Christ in their heart, but the sin in their life is choking out and stealing the confidence in their identity, joy, peace, and the rest of the Fruits of the Spirit. For this group, their priorities aren't straight, whether work is too important or other things are crowding out Christ. This is the only group who is miserable and is most difficult to determine if they are true Christians or not. (Keller)

Good Ground: This soil represents those who receive the Word, and it bears fruit in their soil in differing proportions, though each has a generous harvest. (Gusik)

Soil 4 Test: Those who listen to the Word of God and understand. They are saved by Grace, becoming transformed by the renewing of their minds. They persevere through trials and tough times, showing the Fruits of the Spirit in their lives. They serve, give, and choose to live in a way that brings honor and glory to God, attracting others to want to know Him more and sharing in the harvest. They are salt and light. “But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the Word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop” (Luke 8:15).

QUESTION

Do I see myself in one of these soils today? What is God revealing if I choose to stand in truth?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Gardener of my soul, pull out those thorns, rocks and debris that are cluttering up my heart and distracting me from You. Make the soil of my heart clean. I want to be fully Yours. May I be the salt and light You've called me to be. In Jesus' name, Amen.

FRIDAY

Devotional One

Matthew 13:1-23

Let's quickly review key points of the past few weeks. The Parable of the Four Soils and its explanation are straightforward enough. All of the first three people portrayed are ultimately hard in heart. Their hearts are calcified to the point where it resists all penetration by the seed.

Those who fall away after professing faith are represented by the second and third soils. Without solid rooting in good soil, plants will wither and die under the sun's heat (vv. 5-6). Similarly, some people appear to be thriving believers until persecution reveals their true colors (vv. 20-21), just like those in the 1st century who left Jesus when the going got tough (Hebrews 3:12). Others, like vegetation choked by weeds, are strangled by the cares of this world and the love of money (vv. 7, 22). This is an especially dreadful fate, for the one ensnared in such things does not usually know his predicament until it is too late, considering himself Christ's follower even though he serves his riches (Mark 10:17-22).

We have learned that the fourth soil is notably different. The one who received the seed (God's Word) that fell on good soil understands and bears fruit—he accepts and conforms his life to the Gospel (vv. 8-9, 23). The presence of fruit, not its quantity, is what matters.

Let's reflect on our Christian witness: We are not to prejudge where or in whom we plant God's seeds. We are to spread God's message of love to all His people. We are not to withhold it from the unlovable. Some of our seeds will land along the path, on the rocks, and among the thorns, and not yield a harvest. But some will find their way to the good soil, and an abundant harvest will be in the making. We should not be discouraged. We are just to spread God's message of love to all people and let him take care of the harvest.

QUESTION

Think of the times when you were "sowing seed" and the "soil" was hard or thorny or rocky. How did you present the Gospel?

PRAYER

Father God, we are Your people because of those before us who sowed Your seeds of love in us. Make us bold as we share the harvest with those who have not yet received and accepted you as part of their lives. Help us not to be discouraged when our efforts are rejected or are unfruitful, but to rejoice when the seed falls on fertile soil. Amen.

Devotional Two

Luke 8:16-18 - Active Faith

The Parable of the Four Soils invites action so that we would receive the Word of God to the fullest benefit. How do we actively listen to the Word of God and move from head knowledge to life-changing growth, being the salt of the earth and causing others to thirst for what we have—Christ in us?

You are an influencer in whatever circles God has placed you—work, school, ministry, your home. What impact will you make to bring the kingdom of heaven to earth? If you are a Christian, you are part of the Great Commission, and the mission is not yet complete.

“If you have the truth of God, you have a solemn responsibility to spread that truth in whatever way God gives you opportunity. Those who receive the Word become accountable; so, we must take care how we hear. It is good to hear the Word of God; it’s much better to take heed to *how* you hear. In this parable, Jesus warned His listeners to actively prepare the soil of their heart and mind, to judge themselves as hearers at least as much as they judge the preacher.” (Gusik)

Challenge for this weekend: Prepare your heart and mind for the teaching of God’s Word by asking the Holy Spirit to open your heart, eyes and ears to what you are to learn. Ask for protection from the enemy, to be clear from distractions so that you can receive God’s Word. It is dangerous to hear God’s Word in a passive way without engaging the Word with the mind, the heart, and the will.

In his sermon titled “Heedful Hearing,” Charles Spurgeon suggested some ways to hear the Word of God:

Hear attentively, retentively, believingly, obediently.

Hear candidly, honestly, devoutly, sincerely.

Hear earnestly, spiritually, feelingly, sensitively.

Hear gratefully, prayerfully.

“Whoever has will be given more” (v. 18). Jesus reminds us that spiritual growth follows momentum, positive or negative. When we have the godly habits of receiving the Word and living it, more is built on to that. When we lose those godly habits, they are extremely difficult to get back. (Gusik)

Consider taking an honest spiritual inventory. Ask God to reveal any stumbling points (thorns) in your life that are crowding Him out. Ask for God’s help in being effective and bearing good fruit with the gifts and talents He has given to you.

QUESTION

How will you choose to prepare to hear the Word of God this weekend?

PRAYER

Lord, You stand ready to clear away places in my life that don’t honor You. I just need to ask. Please help me to be spiritually sensitive, live carefully, hear and grow the Word of God actively in my life, then share it with others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Sources:

- Timothy Keller's sermon can be found at https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/the-sower-on-hearing-6082/?fwp_categories=studies
- David Guzik's quotes in Monday and Thursday's devos are taken from https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Mat/Mat-13.cfm?a=942001
- Charles H. Spurgeon's quote is taken from <http://www.godrules.net/library/spurgeon/45spurgeon16.htm>
- Oswald Chambers' quote is taken from *My Utmost for His Highest*, Discovery House Publishers, 1992.
- Douglas Denton's sermon can be found at <https://www.preaching.com/contributors/douglas-g-denton/>
- David Guzik's quotes in Tuesday and Friday's devos are taken from https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Luk/Luk-8.cfm?a=981004
- Charles H. Spurgeon's sermon can be found at <https://www.spurgeongems.org/vols58-60/chs3357.pdf>

