

Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13:1-23

Have you ever wondered why the same book or the same sermon will produce strikingly different results in different people? How is it, for instance, that some people seem unable to grasp the simplest and most obvious spiritual truths while others are transformed by them? In the parable of the sower Jesus talks about different types of soil in order to tell us why this happens.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Describe a firsthand experience—serious or humorous—you have had with farming or with caring for plants in some way. What have you observed about the role of the soil in relation to a plant's ability to thrive?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. We all have areas of our hearts and minds where our “soil” is soft and receptive to God, as well as areas where our “soil” is hard and less receptive. Take some time to reflect on areas of receptivity and areas where you would like God to make you more receptive to his love and his will in your life.

The parable of the sower is Jesus' most important parable because it provides more clues than any other parable as to the nature of parables and how they should be interpreted. The parable is followed by Christ's own interpretation and discussion of its contents. It is an excellent place to begin our study of the parables. *Read Matthew 13:1-23.*

1. Imagine yourself as a farmer or a farmer's child at the time of Jesus listening to this story with the rest of the crowd. What immediate responses might you have to Jesus' use of images of seeds and soil?

2. In verse 10 the disciples ask Jesus, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" How would you summarize his answer (vv. 11-16)?

3. How do parables help Jesus' followers understand his kingdom but hinder the understanding of those who don't follow him closely (vv. 12-17)?

4. In verses 18-23 Jesus explains the meaning of this parable to his

disciples. The seed is the message of the kingdom (v. 19). Who is the farmer, and who is the soil?

5. Satanic “birds” destroyed the value of God’s word for the first group of people. Why? What did these hearers lack (v. 19)?

6. What can we do to help people understand God’s message?

7. Verses 20-21 describe the kind of person referred to as stony or rocky soil. What examples have you seen of people who respond this way?

8. How can we avoid this in our own lives and discourage it in the lives of others?

9. What kind of person does the third type of soil describe (v. 22)?

10. How can we avoid being choked by the weeds and thorns Jesus mentions (v. 23)?

11. Which of the four kinds of soil do you most identify with? Explain.

12. What are some practical examples of how we can become "good soil" (v. 23)?

Thank God for the ways he has opened your heart and mind to his message of love. Invite him to continue to work the soil of your life and to help you be more and more receptive to his love.

Now or Later

In a time of quiet ask God to show you places in your heart and mind where he wants to till, soften and prepare you to hear his Word. Write a prayer in response to what you sense God is showing you.