
INTRO:

Good morning, Church!

Hey, this morning Pastor Sandy is away, so I'll be filling in and teaching from **the book of Matthew – Matthew chapter 13.**

Go ahead and turn there – and if you're in need of a Bible this morning, just raise your hand and our ushers will be around to help you out with that.

Today, we're going to talk about **the four types of soil** that Jesus explores in His parable of the Sower.

There are four types of soil – which are all representative of the condition of our heart when it comes to receiving God's Word in our lives – **and (thus) there are four ways we can respond to the Word and the Work of God.**

Today, we'll talk about what causes each type of response – and what we can DO about it. But I'm praying that (as we study this) – the Holy Spirit will speak to each of us today – and reveal to us things about us, maybe we never even knew ourselves.

So, **let's pray** – and ask God to speak to us through His Word – and by His Spirit.

OPENING PRAYER

Matthew chapter 13 – starting in verse 1:

¹ On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. ² And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. ³ Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵ Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. ⁶ But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. ⁷ And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang

up and choked them. ⁸ But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

I love how Jesus ends the parable saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Which is really the key to this parable – it really drives home His point!

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Let's try something together.

Everyone who has ears in this room, do me a quick favor! Just reach up and (with both hands) – touch your ears for me.

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Good! You know what that means, right? If you were able to find your ears and touch them, that means you do indeed HAVE ears!

Congratulations! *If you don't have ears, I'm so sorry I just did that to you.*

But – taking this a step further – I don't believe Jesus was just saying "If you have ears, you'll listen to Me." I think the emphasis here is, "If you have ears – **TO HEAR** --- then you will listen to – and heed – My words."

Meaning – many have ears. Many can hear. But not all LISTEN – with the **intent** of HEARING – and UNDERSTANDING.

It's like when I'm talking to my baseball team – a group of 9- and 10-year-olds. It never fails. I'm dishing out some of the greatest baseball advice they'll ever receive! 😊 And they're staring off into the abyss. It's then that I say, "Hey – you listen with your EYES." If you're truly listening to me, you'll give me your attention and you'll look in my direction – to hear what I have to say.

See – you don't just "listen" with your ears. And the same is true when it comes to hearing from God.

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The Bible has a nickname. We refer to it as "**God's Word.**" And that's because – that's exactly what it is! This is God's Holy Word – this is His message for each of us – that He's written down on paper – in order for us to truly LISTEN.

Not just with our EARS – but with our **HEARTS.**

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But – see – we’re not the best listeners sometimes, are we?

[I said we’re not the best listeners, are we?! 😊]

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I’ll speak for myself – I’m not the best listener at times, I admit! Sometimes, someone will say something to me, and I find myself putting my attention on what is happening across the room.

There’s something else fighting for my attention – MORE than what it is that I’m hearing right in front of me. See, believe it or not, I – AM – hearing what is being said. I’m just not listening – with ears to hear. With the INTENTION – of comprehending and applying it.

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Now... see, I can take the easy way out and say it’s someone else’s fault. *“Hey, you didn’t communicate it in a way that I could understand it easily. You slurred your words. You spoke in a foreign language!”*

Hey – I could even blame it on the distraction! But those would only be excuses.

But how many times we take the same approach to the Word of God?

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Hey – *“whoever has ears to HEAR – let them hear!”*

Jesus has given us this parable – and He’s about to explain it further --- and as He does, we’re going to see that the hearer of God’s Word will do one of four things with the Word itself.

The hearer (of God’s Word) will either:

1. ***Reject it.***
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2. ***Become immediately happy or emotional about what they’ve heard – but then immediately jump ship the moment anything bad happens.***
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3. ***Take the Word in – but get too distracted by the things of the world to do anything good with it.***
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4. ***Or they will accept the Word of God – and allow it to take root and be turned into the WORK of God.***

Now, listen! You can't just jump straight to the last one that sounds the best and just label yourself as being that person! That's not how this works! 😊

If you do that, you're just going to **tune out** everything I say from this point forward, but that would mean you're in the category of REJECTING it! Don't tune me out – and don't be so quick to label YOURSELF.

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As we study it, let's make note of some things real quick. We have some main characters to introduce in our story.

The **SOWER** – in this parable – represents JESUS.

The **SEED** – represents the Word of God.

And the **SOIL** – represents the HEART of those who hear the Word of God.

So, we have the SOWER [Jesus] – the SEED [the Word of God] – and the SOIL [our hearts].

Let's pick it back up in verse 18, where Jesus now goes on to EXPLAIN the parable of the Sower. He says:

¹⁸ "Therefore hear the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. ²⁰ But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. ²² Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. ²³ 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."

Jesus explains:

The first type of soil is the soil that is known as the soil of the "**WAYSIDE (v4; v19)**." When you picture a garden, this is the type of soil that is off to the side, mostly used to walk on – as not to disturb the crop. These are like the rows in the fields. The paths are very hard – and compacted – because there's lots of foot traffic.

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It's like prepping a path before building a road. If the road is not compacted enough, it will begin to fill up with potholes and wreak havoc on your car! **And next thing you know, Arnold Schwarzenegger is out there filling in potholes because no one else is doing anything about it! There he is – the "TARMINATOR."**

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But the whole idea of compacting the soil underneath the asphalt – is for the very PURPOSE of **NOT** ALLOWING anything to pass through – and reach what lies beneath.

So, you can begin to see the fallacy behind having our hearts hard like soil of the wayside.

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Now – as a quick side note – this is not just the seed of God's Word, the Bible – I believe this refers ALSO to the work of God's Spirit – in our lives. It's not just a WRITTEN Word we need to heed – it's a SPOKEN – LIVING – and ACTIVE Word – given at any moment.

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When the Seed of God's Word is scattered on a hard heart, all the Seed can do is bounce away – and scatter even further.

In fact – in Luke's version of this parable, birds come and snatch the seed AWAY – which is representative of Satan coming and snatching the Good Work of God's Word away from a heart that resembles the path of the wayside.

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How does one's heart become so hardened – that not even the Word of God can penetrate it and break through to reach it?

I'd like to suggest looking at a couple of Scriptures to help us understand this concept – because it doesn't only happen to just NON-Christians – **[Hear me out – "if you have ears to hear," right?]** – but this same thing happens to many Christians, as well.

Yes, this may have been you at one point. It may be you at some point in the future – or it may even be you at this very moment right now. And you may not even know it.

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There are other times though – that a hard heart is formed as a direct result of **sin** in our lives. It can be **pride** – at other time, **disobedience** – and and then sometimes it's just sheer **rebellion**.

And when WE continually do the things that WE desire to do (instead of what God has for us – and what He’s speaking in our hearts), our hearts begin the slow process of decay and death. It leads to a fossilization – and petrification. And a hard heart.

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Take Pharoah for instance:

In *Romans 9*, God says this of Pharoah (v17-18): “... ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.’ Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.”

Now, this is a difficult verse to grasp – because it sounds like God just hardens hearts at will. And if that’s true, then who would ever stand a chance?? Right? How does He decide?

But I believe --- that IF God hardens the heart of **ANYONE** – He will harden the heart of *those who have* – **ALREADY** – hardened **their OWN heart** – towards the work of God in their life.

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It’s as if God said, “Okay, Pharoah. I’ve tried to get your attention, but we have reached the point of no return. If your decision is to continually harden your heart towards Me, I will let it be hardened.”

See, much like the carpenter who places a seal on the outside of hardened wood, God places a “seal” upon the already-hard heart. And I pray none of us ever reach the point to where God looks upon us and says, “Okay. If this is your choice, then I will let your heart be hardened.”

You need to KNOW – that God never gives up on us – please know that. **BUT** God will never force us to allow His work to be done in our lives. That decision can only be made – by us.

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And then... (as if that wasn’t bad enough):

Paul says in 1 Timothy 4, verses 1-2, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron...”

At some point... there’s a **cauterization** that takes place.

In the medical world, a cauterization might be necessary to stop bleeding, to remove abnormal tissue, or to treat infections and other conditions. And when this occurs, a doctor will use extreme heat – to destroy the tissue – that’s causing the problem.

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What happens SPIRITUALLY then – is the more and more we sin (especially with no desire of repentance of any kind), then the more COMFORTABLE we become with that sin – and it then becomes easier and easier to do it again. And again. And again. With no sign of remorse. With no fear of repercussion or consequence. And that, my friends, takes a major toll on our conscience. In fact, it begins to destroy it.

Before long, as Paul said, we allow our conscience to become seared – as with a hot iron. And when we allow our heart to become seared because of sin, it then becomes sealed OFF – to what God would ever be able to do with it.

God might then **seal** – what we have already allowed to become **seared**.

And do you know what this does to a person? **It makes for quite the hard heart.** A heart that the Word of God will bounce right off of – and scatter – just like a seeds that fall by the wayside.

The bird will come (that is, Satan) – and he will snatch it up, because it has no chance of reaching past the surface.

That soil is so compacted – the heart is so hardened – that there's an attitude of apathy. There's a lack of care.

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Only GOD – can give you a new heart. And He can. He can begin a new work. A "heart transplant," if you will.

Although God was speaking of Israel, I think the same thought applies to us today. In **Ezekiel 36:26-29, God says, "I will give you a new heart – and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh – and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. I will deliver you from all your uncleanness."**

What a promise. And I believe God can do this same thing for you today, if your heart has been hardened towards Him in any way.

But for that to happen – *your heart needs to first be **surrendered**.*

The best part about surrendering to the Lord – is knowing that **we're not surrendering to an enemy.**

The second type of soil Jesus mentions is that which is STONY GROUND (v5-6; v20-21).

Verse 20 tells us:

²⁰ But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

Notice what makes this type of soil unique. It says (in verse 5) that it “*did not have much earth.*” Meaning – it lacked any real DEPTH! There was no room for any ROOTS to sink down into.

A simple science experiment will prove that a seed can grow without any soil. You can germinate a seed just by simply watering it and watching it begin to sprout. But without any soil at THAT point to nourish it? It will spring up quickly! A good work will begin! But when the sun comes up, the seed becomes scorched. Without any roots, the seed withers away.

That’s because a seed cannot grow UP – ***if it cannot root DOWN.*** And likewise, YOU cannot grow up – if you are not able to sink your roots into God’s Word. And into God’s fellowship. And into a true relationship with Jesus Christ.

We cannot let Sunday mornings be the only time we are in God’s Word. Are we being “spoon-fed” by others? Or are we spending time in His Word by ourselves? And seeing what He has to say to us ***personally?***

Our relationship with God – cannot be defined by our attendance at church.

Just SHOWING up – is not GROWING up. For that, you need ROOTS.

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Do you realize – it’s the ROOTS of a plant – that actually STABILIZE the plant?

Without roots, a plant is blown over in every storm. ***My boys have a baseball net they can practice their hitting into. But we’re missing 1 or 2 of the pegs that hold it into the ground. So, it never fails! Every time the wind blows against the net, the net just BLOWS OVER! We’re constantly picking it up.*** But guess what?? That’s the reason it came with pegs! So that we could stabilize it into the ground – to keep it from blowing over. *If only I could find the missing pegs!* 😊

Let me ask you: When trials come your way, do you just fall over? Do you get knocked down easily? Does your whole world shake and rock when a problem comes your way? Is your JOY (that you once had in the Lord) easily stolen?

You know how that goes. Every time you start doing good – “something bad always happens”, right?! You just can’t seem to catch a break, can you?

Well, did you know – God has a Word for you on that?

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In *Isaiah 55 – verses 10 and 11 – God tells us, “For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”*

This means that God has a purpose for every Seed that He scatters! *Unlike me! I’m not much of a “green thumb.” In fact, I have a propensity to make plants DIE!*

But see – God’s Word never returns void. It has a purpose – every single time. The seed is planted in exactly the right place – at the right time. ***But it DOESN’T mean – that the soil of my heart – is always READY – to receive it.***

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You’ve heard the saying, *“If a tree falls in the forest and no one’s around, will it make a sound?”*

Well, yes – of course, it does! But how easy would it be for us to say that BECAUSE we didn’t hear it, that it never made a sound.

See – did the tree just not make a sound?? Or was I just not there to hear it? Was I just not – in the **presence** – of the work that was taking place?

We like to plead ignorance and claim that God’s Word wasn’t loud enough – all the while, we’re just not listening. We say, *“God just isn’t speaking to me. I’ve prayed and I’ve prayed, and I’ve prayed, but God has said nothing.”*

Let us not forget what *James 4:7-8 tell us. It says, “Therefore SUBMIT to God. RESIST the devil and he will flee from you. Draw NEAR to God – and He will draw near to you.”*

Perhaps God is speaking, but not in the way we WANT Him to. Perhaps God is speaking – but we’re not listening.

I’m not accusing you this morning of having a hard heart! But I **AM** speaking from experience in saying – there have been many times in my life – where I thought God was just not speaking. All the while, I wasn’t listening – at least with ears to hear.

When we just “go through the motions”? Pray the same prayer over and over? Read His Word half-heartedly just to “say we did it?”

We are not leaning in – with ears to hear. And when this happens, we begin to close ourselves off to God – most likely without even realizing it.

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And are you as eager to receive the verses that AREN'T as digestible – as you are to receive the ones that are?

I can get behind the fact that God loved me so much that He gave Me His only Son so that I can have everlasting life (if I believe in Him). But can I get behind a verse that tells me that what I'm doing is WRONG??

Do I believe that God truly is FOR me – and not against me?

Am I taking Him at His Word and trusting in all His promises??

Is the soil of my heart – ready to receive His Word – no matter how painful – or maybe even “unbelievable” at times?

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Every, single Seed that He sows has a purpose. Which means, if I'm not in God's Word? Then **I** am the one missing out on a specific purpose that God intends to accomplish within my life.

If you want a deeper relationship with God today, then you've got to allow His Word to sink in and dig some roots in your heart.

Hey – when you do – there's fruit to follow!

The third type of soil we see here is the soil that contains THORNS (v7; v22).

Verse 22:

²² Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

you've ever walked through a patch of thorns, you'll know right away that they are not desirable.

Hey – ***what kid hasn't stepped into the woods to retrieve an overthrown ball, only to come out with thorns stuck to their legs? You can be as careful as a spy, but it's inevitable – you are BOUND to get thorns stuck to your leg. And if you haven't figured it out yet, they hurt!***

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In the parable here, the **thorns represent anything of the world**. ESPECIALLY – the things that take our time and attention away from God.

They come in the form of *material possessions* – *physical pleasures* – *the worries of this life* – **PHYSICAL** things... that **DISTRACT** – and take our attention away – from **SPIRITUAL** things.

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And what they do – is they end up becoming a major COMPETITION in our lives – for what God is planting in us – through His Word.

Practically, this displays itself in the person who really enjoys fellowship – coming to church – spending time in God's Word – prayer – worship --- yet when they go back out into the world outside of the four walls of the church, the world begins fighting for their attention again.

They get distracted. They forget Biblical truth. They allow the work God just did to get choked out.

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Hey – I can't help coming across some thorns every now and then as I walk through this world. But I **CAN** help – what I allow to STICK to me as I pass through it.

1 John 2:15-16 reminds us, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world."

The person who finds comfort with a heart full of lusts for the things of this world... the riches of life... the pleasures of this world? **THIS** person – will find themselves losing the battle to thorns – every time.

Their attention is drawn away from God's Word. They no longer have time for the things of God – or even a close RELATIONSHIP with God, because they put their attention on the pleasures and joys of this life. They even find solace – and security in it. They invest in the joy of the world – MORE than they invest in the joy of the Lord.

They find their "status" – and identity – in their position among the world.

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See – the joy that the WORLD has to offer – often appears to look like fruit. But (in reality) – it's disguised as thorns.

So much of God's GOOD things that He created – have become so tainted by the world! God's truth has been redefined in so many areas – and truth has been twisted in such a way – that the THORNS are made to LOOK like actual fruit.

Let me suggest: When you get used to looking at thorns in a garden, you begin to forget that they shouldn't even be there in the first place.

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The thing about having a garden is you can't just build one in the backyard and then go live your life for the next three months without ever looking at it again.

My wife has been wanting a garden for years, so for Mother's Day this past year, my kids and I decided it was time to fulfill her wish!

We built some gardening boxes and Jenny finally got her garden! She is now the proud owner of a 4'x12' square foot area in the backyard 😊.

And let me tell you – she's done such a great job! From the time she **planted the seeds**, to *picking out the weeds*, to **watering it**, to *picking out more weeds*, to **spraying it to keep the bugs off**, to *picking more weeds out*, to **spraying it again to keep the deer from eating the harvest**, to *picking out more weeds*, to **harvesting the fruit and vegetables**, to *keeping the weeds out* – she has truly done a great job. But I bet if you asked her about the process, she'd tell you it was not as easy as just planting it and then watching it grow with no work going into it.

See – you probably didn't catch the fact that she had to ***pick weeds out of the garden***, did you? 😊 -- but she has!

Hey – she didn't PLANT weeds, but guess what? They came anyway! It's not enough to just have FERTILE soil that will allow the seeds to take root and grow into something healthy. Because fertile soil will also grow weeds.

You've got to put the time and attention into the soil to always make sure it will reap – a healthy harvest. It takes a cultivation. It takes determination. It takes hard work. It takes a little **SWEAT** from time to time. But the thorns and the thistles must go.

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Yes, it takes the work of GOD, but we must not be lazy with OUR part!

I think (sometimes) we reach a point where we look out into the field of our hearts and see the overgrown land... and we think, *"That's just too much. I can't take care of all that."*

We grow apathetic to the thorns. We get used to them. We become lazy in our approach to them.

Proverbs 24:30-34 reveals to us the harvest of a lazy man. It says, "I went by the field of the lazy man, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; and there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles; its stone wall was broken down. When I saw it, I considered it well; I looked on it and received instruction: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest; so shall your poverty come like a prowler, and your need like an armed man."

See – the lazy man lays his head down – “just for a few minutes,” right? It’s always “just a few minutes.” But when he awakes, he is awakened to a surprise.

Everything that once “WAS” – is now overgrown. It’s full of thorns. And nettles that sting – they hurt to the touch. The walls are broken down and there’s no more protection.

The lazy man lay his head down to rest – and woke up in poverty. Now before you go thinking this only applies to a FINANCIAL poverty, **think about your own SPIRITUAL poverty!**

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But notice the wise man. He saw ANOTHER man’s destruction – and when he did, he “considered it well.” Now, he didn’t consider it as BEING “well” with himself. But he considered it GREATLY – **in his own heart.**

When we read the parable of the Sower – even the proverb here of the lazy man – do we consider these words as being “well” with us? Are we OKAY with there being thorns in our life?

Or do we consider them greatly – and then do something about them?

The fourth and final type of soil that we see from this passage is that of GOOD GROUND (v8; v23).

Jesus said in verse 23:

²³ 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."

Here now, we see **GOOD GROUND** -- ground that has been prepared – for whatever the Lord may want to do. It’s a heart that is OPEN – it’s ENRICHED – and it’s SOFT – prepped and ready for **fruit.**

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Hey – if the soil is of the wayside? It’s not good ground.
If it’s stony ground? It’s not good ground.

If it's full of thorns? It's not good ground.

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My grandfather used to have a garden in his backyard. I remember growing up and making visits to his house, where I'd look upon his garden with great admiration. There were times we'd help plant seeds and there were times we'd help reap the great harvest. But one thing I will always remember is watching him *till up the ground each year before he would plant anything. The first step every year was tilling up the ground – loosening the hard soil that became clumpy – removing the weeds and thorns that made their way into the area over the deadness of winter – stirring up the nutrients buried deep down – and preparing the ground ... for something good that was to come.*

Ironically, by tilling up the ground – essentially what you're doing is taking what was once very much ALIVE – but now has become **infertile** – and **hard to work with**.

If that same soil ever wishes to be used again in a way that will bear fruit, an **uprooting** must first take place. A **stirring** of the soil is necessary. An **overturning** of the stagnancy is needed.

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And let me tell you – God is the – **Master Gardener** – of our hearts. God can revive a beautiful garden in your life – no matter what the soil looks like now. He knows what it takes to get it just right. And He CAN – and He WILL – **when we surrender – the soil of our hearts – to Him**. He can take what has been dead all winter – and spring up in us – new life. He can remove the thorns – and clear out the garbage that has robbed you of God's good works.

*Just like a beautiful field on the side of the road with trash thrown from cars passing by – **OUR HEARTS** – become the dumping ground for the trash – that the world continually tosses out at us.*

We need some cleaning up – in preparation for that fruitful harvest that's ahead.

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Because if **GOOD GROUND** is what brings forth fruit, there is only one way for that to happen. Fruit is born of a seed. So, if we wish to see fruit in our lives, then it will begin with the planting of the Seed – of God's WORD in our lives.

*“And let us **NOT** grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall **REAP** if we do not lose heart.” (Galatians 6:9)*

How many of you believe that this morning?

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If we walk in the Spirit – allowing God’s Spirit to WATER – and NOURISH – what God is sowing through His Word – ***we will begin to see fruit.***

And wouldn’t you like to see that fruit in your life?

Hey – in case you don’t know! You can sow your OWN “fruit” – or you can let God produce HIS fruit in you.

The Bible says *(in Galatians 6:7), “Do not be deceived[!], God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will OF the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the SPIRIT reap everlasting life.”*

That’s because GOD’s work is SPIRITUAL – which makes it both **IN**-ternal – and **E**-ternal. Which is contrary to the work of MAN – which is only temporary – because it’s of the flesh.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (Galatians 5:22)

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We can’t forget – that God’s Work in our in the life of a believer – will bring forth a **HARVEST**. And it will be GOOD.

And I don’t know about you – but I want the **best spiritual harvest** I can get in my life! I desire to (one day) present the best harvest I can before God.

It’s GOD who is working the eventual harvest in me – but it’s according to what I allow Him to do in my heart. I want to (one day) say, *“God – look at the result – of what YOU’ve done in my life. And now I present it back to you – as my offering (as my offering of **worship**).”*

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Let me point something out this morning – God’s Word is NEVER-changing. That’s why you can read the same passage time and time again and each time maybe it just never speaks to you. Until one day it just resonates with you like never before.

What changed? Was it God’s Word?

Nope! God’s Word never changes, remember?

What has changed – is YOU! And your reception of God’s Word in that moment.

The condition of your heart has been softened to the point of breakthrough. God spoke to you – and you received it.

Because God's Word pierces through with TRUTH – and truth is one thing you can't deny – **not matter what the WORLD defines as truth!**

God's Truth is written right here – and we know from **Hebrews 4:12** that, *"... the word of God is living – and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* (Hebrews 4:12)

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I love the words of **Psalm 119:10-12**, which say, *"With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You. Blessed are You, O Lord! Teach me Your statutes."*

These words are my prayer for you and me today. That we would seek God with our whole hearts – in His Word – through prayer – in our worship – in our everyday lives. That we would not wander from His commandments. Which means we have to KNOW His commandments, which means we have to KNOW His Word, which means we have to READ His Word. And when we READ His Word, we will know it and be able to hide it in our hearts.

Why? So that we might not sin against God. Blessed are You, O Lord – TEACH ME – Your statutes. TEACH ME – Your ways, O Lord!

The author of Hebrews quotes **Psalm 95 (v7-8)** – he says, *"Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts..."*.

He who has ears to hear? Is he who is of a soft heart. Eager to know God. And soak in His words, to bring new life again and again.

And if you want to know who God is? Read His Word. If you want to know the Way, the Truth, and the Life? Let it begin here with His Word.

But then may we RESPOND to Him – always in an act of surrender – always in a way of worship – always with a soft and open heart – that says, *"Lord, I'm listening. Speak to me. I have ears to hear – what You're saying. And I have a heart to receive it today."*

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Let's pray.

CLOSING PRAYER

If you need a fresh start today, may it begin right here. Right now. Perhaps you need a little tilling of the soil of your heart today. If that's you, we'd love to pray with you.

We have prayer counselors right down here and we'd love to pray with you – and for you – for God to begin a new work in you.

Let's go out with a song of praise!