

The Parable of the Sower

One of the most important parables that Jesus delivered for us in his ministry is the Parable of the Sower (or the Parable of the Soils). Jesus delivered this parable in 3 of the 4 gospel accounts in Matt. 13:1-20, Mark 4:1-20, and Luke 8:4-15. Here we find the teaching of Jesus of multiple responses to the word by children of God. Some in the way side are deceived by Satan before they understand the word. Some in the stony ground shoot up very quickly, but don't have strong roots or good moisture and fade away in tribulation. Some in the thorny ground bring forth fruit but then get distracted and consumed with the world and are choked out by thorns. Then, we find varying degrees of fruit in the good ground, some bringing forth 30, 60, or 100-fold. God is glorified when we "*bear much fruit*" (John 15:8). There are many obstacles that can diminish our abundant fruitfulness in the kingdom: Satan, tribulations, thorns, riches, lust, cares, and pleasures. Therefore, we must be vigilant to beat back these obstacles to bring forth abundant fruit to glorify Jesus Christ. We will find that the word of God is the remedy for all these obstacles restricting our fruit-bearing. We need to understand and keep the word of God to beat back Satan, discouragement, and thorns in our life to bring forth abundant fruit to glorify our Lord.

How Then Will Ye Know All Parables?

Great multitudes were following Jesus, so he got into a ship with the great multitude on the shore, and he taught the people from the ship (Matt. 13:2). He spoke to the multitude in parables (Matt. 13:10-15, 34-35) but only gave more detailed explanations afterward to his 12 disciples (Mark 4:10). Jesus spoke in parables to the multitude to conceal the mysteries of the kingdom from "*them that are without*" (Mark 4:11). However, it was given to the disciples of Christ to understand the mystery of the kingdom of God through these parables. Only those with spiritual ears to hear could understand these spiritual lessons that Jesus was teaching. Jesus says the parable of the sower is almost the key that unlocks all the rest of the kingdom parables. "*And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?*" (Mark 4:13) In the Matt. 13 account, Jesus goes on to deliver 6 more parables about the kingdom of God. Therefore, understanding this parable of the sower is of utmost importance to understanding the rest of the kingdom parables. This parable shows us that there will be different responses to the gospel. Not every child of God will press into the kingdom in the same manner or with the same diligence. We need to understand this in the church; otherwise, we will be greatly discouraged when we only find a "few" people walking faithfully on the narrow way of discipleship (Matt. 7:13-14). Therefore, we need to understand this parable to unlock the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

What does this parable mean? Thankfully, for this parable, Jesus Christ actually gives us the full explanation of what it means that we can consider together. First of all, we see that the sower is spreading forth the word of God; "*the sower soweth the word*" (Mark 4:14); "*the seed is the word of God*" (Luke 8:11). Jesus explains the different responses that we will receive when we share the word of God with others. The primary characteristic of all 4 of these grounds is that they all "hear the word". Only those that have "ears to hear" can hear the words of God. Jesus Christ told all 7 of the churches of Asia the same thing, "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*" (Rev. 2:7, etc) We see that "ears to hear" are given to hear the Spirit; these are spiritual ears that are given to hear the spiritual teaching to God's church. One must already be born again to have these spiritual ears to hear the teaching of the Spirit. Only God's born-again children, the Lord's sheep, can hear the words of Jesus in their hearts (John 10:25-27). There are others that have no ability to hear God's word (John 8:43) because they have not been quickened and only have the natural, stony heart and only natural ears. They only have a natural mind and cannot receive the spiritual teaching of the gospel (1 Cor. 2:14). Therefore, since each of these "hear the word", all 4 of these grounds describe different responses to the gospel by children of God based on their current manner of life. By implication, there is also a fifth category of the unregenerate who cannot hear the word that we will consider last.

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Each of these grounds describes the manner of life of some Christians and how they receive the word of God. However, we can all find ourselves in each of these grounds to a degree at different points in our life. A Christian might initially not respond to the gospel in the way side, but later repent and pursue good ground discipleship. The same can be true for a stony ground believer that shoots up quickly but then falls away. They can, and hopefully do, repent and also pursue good ground discipleship. It's also possible for those previously in the good ground to be choked out with thorns and backslide to become unfruitful. Then, we also know even the good ground can vary in degrees of fruitfulness. At different points in our life, we might bring forth 30, 60, or 100-fold, and then either progress or regress in fruitfulness throughout our life. Therefore, we consider this parable to examine the weaknesses of the unfruitful ground and the strengths of the good ground to implement those good things in our lives to bring forth more abundant fruit to the glory of God.

There are 5 types of grounds taught by Jesus in this parable; 4 directly and 1 by implication. We will consider these 5 different grounds teaching the different responses we will see in the preaching of God's word.

- The way side
- The stony ground
- The thorny ground
- The good ground
- Those who cannot hear the word

The Way Side

The first of the four types of ground – the different types of responses to the gospel by God's children – is the seed which fell by the way side. The problem with those who hear the word by the way side is that they don't "understand" the word they heard. *"When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side."* (Matt. 13:19) These children of God hear the word and that word is "sown in their heart". Only a child of God can have the word truly touch their heart. The word of God touches their heart; they are "pricked" in the heart by God's word (Acts 2:37). The message they hear in their ears resonates with the truth and law that is already written in their heart by the new birth. However, since they don't "understand" what they hear, they are susceptible to Satan deceiving them before they act on their internal convictions. Satan deceives these children quickly lest they should *"believe and be saved"* (Luke 8:12). The only people who can believe in Christ are born again children of God. These people by the way side have the ability to believe and be saved which is only applicable to the children of God. We are saved to heaven by the blood of Christ alone. Therefore, in what context can they believe and be saved? These children of God do not yet "understand" the word of God. The Lord desires for all his children *"to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"* (1 Tim. 2:4). The gospel and God's word gives the born-again child of God the knowledge of the truth to understand what Jesus Christ has already done for them in eternal salvation. There is tremendous salvation, deliverance, and peace in the heart of God's children when they hear and believe the gospel.

Unfortunately, before they can be taught properly to understand the word of God, these way side Christians are deceived by Satan; they are *"trodden down"* and *"devoured"* by the fowls (Luke 8:5). Satan is always on the prowl to try to deceive possible new converts before they become devoted disciples. Immediately, the devil *"taketh away the word out of their hearts"* (Luke 8:12). This cannot be describing eternal salvation because this would give Satan the power to remove our regenerated new heart and take Jesus (the living Word) out of our hearts. God forbid! That can certainly never happen. However, Satan can certainly distract us before we fully "understand" the gospel, which is the case with the people by the way side. Satan desires

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to blind the minds of those children of God who currently do not believe lest the light of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ should come unto them (2 Cor. 4:3-6). The gospel gives the child of God “understanding” (which is what the way side is lacking) to believe the gospel and rejoice in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross and salvation by grace alone. Satan is attempting to stymie the reception of the word in every child of God’s heart, so we need to be prepared for that opposition and try to protect these new converts from being “trodden” under foot or “devoured” by the devil. We need to understand that Satan is actively attempting to steal away and deceive these children of God who do not yet understand the truth. Therefore, we need to be sure to disciple and teach these new, vulnerable disciples, so they do properly understand God’s word to not be swayed by the devil.

The Stony Ground

Next, we find another type of response to the word which we might call the “microwave Christian” in the stony ground. Like in a microwave, these children of God believe and get really hot really fast, but then they also cool off very quickly when tribulation comes. These stony ground Christians hear the word of God and “*sprang up*” quickly (Matt. 13:5). They initially receive the word “*with joy*” (Matt. 13:20) and “*with gladness*” (Mark 4:17). Notice again, these are not false professors and unregenerate because they hear the word with “joy”, a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). They spring up fast and are very joyful and happy to finally hear the message of their salvation by grace alone. They believe the word (Luke 8:13), but then they only endure for a short time (Mark 4:17). Unfortunately, when tribulation and persecution come for the word’s sake, they are offended and fade away. “*And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.*” (Mark 4:17). Offended here literally means “caused to stumble”. Jesus gave us his words in scripture so that we would not be offended and stumble. “*These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.*” (John 16:1) Since God’s children are so prone to stumble in our walk of discipleship, it is a great blessing to not be offended and stumble and grow in fruitfulness to the good ground. “*Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.*” (Matt. 11:6)

The reason why tribulation and persecution come in this believer’s life is “*for the word’s sake*” (Mark 4:17). The word of God requires that we change our life to conform to its teachings, and that requires leaving some things behind that we used to do in the past. When this child of God starts applying the word of God in their life, this will inevitably cause friction with their past friends who have not repented. “*Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.*” (1 Pet. 4:4) This Christian makes changes in their life to conform to the word of God, but now they are facing ridicule and persecution from their former friends. Unfortunately, they have not had time to grow a deep, strong root system to faithfully endure this persecution. Therefore, they “*for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away*” (Luke 8:13). There is no indication in this text that these are unregenerate, false professors. No, they heard and believed the word with joy and gladness. They put the word of God into action in their life, which a false professor will never truly do. However, they did not have enough stability in their roots in God’s word to withstand temptation, and they fall away.

A false professor can never biblically “fall away” anyway. You have to be in an elevated position to have the ability to fall. You have to be somewhere to fall away from it. An unregenerate person is dead in sins and can’t fall anyway from anything because they are spiritually dead. Any indication to falling away in scripture must be describing a child of God who has life but has the ability to stumble and fall. Dead people can’t fall; they’re in a casket. Essentially all the Galatian churches were in danger of living out the stony ground. They had initially heard and believed the gospel of grace with joy and gladness, but now they were tempted to revert back to the law. If they submitted back to a works salvation under the law, then they would

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be “fallen from grace”. *“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.”* (Gal. 5:4) Again, you can not fall from a position you were never in. You can’t fall “from grace” unless you were already “in grace”. These Christians in Galatia were not in danger of losing eternal life; they were in danger of losing the power of the gospel in their life, forfeiting abundant life and kingdom blessings to live back under the bondage of the law and a works salvation. We see a similar falling away of God's children in Heb. 6:4-10. They had previously been enlightened, tasted of the heavenly gift, partook of the Holy Ghost, tasted the good word of the Lord (heard the word) and the powers of the world to come. However, they fell away (v.6) from steadfast discipleship and forfeited the assurance and peace of a life spent in obedience to Christ. When the sun got hot (when the heat of persecution intensified), then these stony ground Christians *“wither away”* and the sun *“scorched”* it (Matt. 13:6).

Why did the stony ground Christian fade away from steadfast discipleship when tribulation and persecution came?

- They had *“no deepness of earth”* (Matt. 13:5)
- They had *“no root”* (Matt. 13:6)
- They *“lacked moisture”* (Luke 8:6)

Any young plant will not have a deep root system. It takes time for roots to grow. The lack of a deep, strong root system will prevent the plant from withstanding strong storms. These young, excited believers did not establish a strong root system and deepness of earth in the word of God. They were not like the tree planted by the rivers of water that brought forth abundant fruit in his season (Ps. 1:1-4). Why did that tree bring forth such abundant fruit? Because that Christian delighted and meditated in the word of God (v.2) and put the word into action by living godly and forsaking sinful situations (v.1). Notice also the tree was by a great water source (by a river) that provided great moisture and allowed its roots to grow deep and strong for stability.

Knowing and growing in the word of God is actually the remedy for all the symptoms that caused this plant to fade away during tribulation. The word of God is what “roots and grounds” us to where we are not tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine. A strong root system allows us to not be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, but we should be established in the faith as a stable, mighty oak, not a swaying palm tree in the wind (Eph. 4:14). We need to be *“rooted and built up”* in the faith and in the word (Col. 2:6-7). We need to be *“rooted and grounded in love”* (Eph. 3:17). The word of God is nourishing water to the growth of the child of God. *“10) For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: 11) So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”* (Isaiah 55:10-11) Jesus, who is the Word of God, is the living waters to the child of God where they will never thirst. The water of Jesus Christ's words shall be as a well of water springing up into everlasting life in our hearts. *“But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”* (John 4:14). They didn't last when the heat got turned up (the sun scorched them, Matt. 13:6) and tribulation and persecution came because they had: 1) no strong depth of soil, 2) no strong root system, and 3) no moisture. We need to strengthen these believers because every new convert is susceptible to falling away if they do not have a strong foundation in doctrine and practice taught in the word of God (roots and moisture).

Paul was concerned about those early converts to the church fading away when they endured tribulation. What was his response? Paul came back and taught them again to remind them and strengthen them in the word of God, so they would be stronger when more tribulation inevitably came for the word's sake.

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“21) And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, 22) Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:21-22) It is inevitable that we will encounter “much tribulation” when we live according to God’s word in our lives. We need to have this realistic understanding when we count the cost before taking up our cross to follow Christ (Luke 14:27-28). Paul wanted to remind those new susceptible Christians that you will have to endure much tribulation to enter into the kingdom of God. Discipleship will be hard; we will face much tribulation; if we are not stabilized in the word of God, we are susceptible to being burnt up in tribulation and withering away. Therefore, we must stabilize our lives and strengthen our hearts with the root and moisture of God’s word to stabilize our hearts for when we inevitably face affliction and persecution for the word’s sake.

The Thorny Ground

Then, we find another type of ground where a child of God initially brings forth fruit but allows the thorns of the world to grow up and quench their fruitfulness in the kingdom. Again, these are children of God which initially hear the word and believe it. However, they allow the thorns to *“choke the word and he becometh unfruitful”* (Matt. 13:22). This child of God was bearing the fruit of the Spirit, but then they “become” unfruitful. You can’t become unfruitful unless you had life and were bearing fruit to start with. Unfortunately, these children of God get too comfortable and friendly with the world and the thorns of this world; then, the word is “choked” out in their life. They are initially living by the word in their life, but the fruit is choked to where they *“bring no fruit to perfection”* (Luke 8:14). These are not unregenerate, dead vines with no life. No, they are vines that are not “maturing” onto “perfection”. The thorns in this world will prevent the child of God from growing on to “perfection” in our spiritual walk. In 2 Peter 1:5-10, we see the proper growth pattern for God’s children, beginning with faith and culminating in charity. We must be diligent to grow in our walk with the Lord, otherwise, we are susceptible to becoming “barren and unfruitful” in the knowledge of Christ (v.8). Thorns are not a good place to plant a crop. Even in the Old Testament, they were commanded to not sow their seed among thorns – *“break up your fallow ground and sow not among thorns”* (Jer. 4:23). We are not as fruitful as we ought to be because we are spiritual infants, not progressing on to spiritual maturity and perfection.

Thorns will certainly tangle you up, and it is very difficult to get free from thorns. Paul warns Timothy – and us today as well – to be vigilant to not be *“entangled with the affairs of this life”* (2 Tim. 2:4). It is very easy for the thorns of this world to get us all “tangled up” and diminish our fruitfulness in the kingdom of God. Thorns can certainly inflict pain on us too. Thorns are painful when they prick you; painful if they remain; they are also painful in the extraction too. One of these worldly thorns is the deceitfulness of riches. Coveting after riches can cause us to *“pierce [ourselves] through with many sorrows”* (1 Tim. 6:10). The thorn of coveting after riches will pierce you through with many sorrows. Thorns come up naturally in nature and in our lives. Thorns are the result of man’s sin. The garden of Eden was perfect, and it appears that plants just grew naturally perfect. However, after Adam’s sin, the ground was cursed; the result of that curse was that now the ground would bring forth “thorns and thistles” (Gen. 3:18). Thorns are now prone to come up naturally in this sin-cursed earth. Therefore, we must be diligent to tend the garden of our life to keep the worldly thorns at bay because they will naturally grow up. We have to be proactive to remove these thorns from our life. Otherwise, the natural disposition of these thorns is for them to grow, entangle us, and diminish our fruitfulness in the kingdom of God.

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Let us consider the 4 types of thorns given to us in this parable:

- *“the cares of this world”* (Matt. 13:22)
- *“the deceitfulness of riches”* (Matt. 13:22)
- *“the pleasures of this life”* (Luke 8:14)
- *“the lust of other things”* (Mark 4:19)

The cares of this world. (Matt. 13:22, Mark 4:19, Luke 8:14) There is not a single disciple of Christ who does not struggle with beating back the thorn of the cares of this world. We need to live our lives with appropriate caution, looking both ways when we cross the street. We need to make plans for the future, think about tomorrow, always saying if the Lord will, we will do this or that. However, we cannot be consumed with the “cares” of this world to the point that this care causes fear or anxiety in our lives. Jesus taught that we can become so consumed with the cares of this world that we are not watchful for the second coming of the Lord and that day can come upon us unawares (Luke 21:34). Instead of being consumed with fear and anxiety over the cares of this world, we are to relinquish the cares of this world over to the Lord in prayer. *“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”* (Phil. 4:6). The thorns of the cares of this world can certainly overtake our minds and diminish and even quench our fruitfulness in the kingdom of God. Therefore, we need to give up those cares unto God and have peace in our minds and hearts.

The deceitfulness of riches. (Matt. 13:22, Mark 4:19, Luke 8:14) Notice the language here that riches can be “deceitful”. Riches promise peace and prosperity and joy, but instead, riches can deceive the child of God and quench their fruitfulness in the kingdom of God. It was by the covetousness of riches that some children of God had *“erred from the faith”* and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:9-10). Covetousness of riches caused some to “err from the faith”. You can’t err from the faith if you are a false professor and never in the faith. These children of God were enticed and deceived by riches and fell prey by Satan to the thorn of covetousness. These riches deceitfully promised happiness, but instead caused shipwreck of their faith and were pierced through with the thorn of covetousness. Money is a necessary part of life. We have to use money to transact business in this world, and there is nothing inherently evil about money. Money is not evil, but the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:10). The covetousness of riches can deceive us in this world. Therefore, we need to always place money in the proper context in our lives. We use money, but we never seek riches. Riches can be deceitful if not viewed and handled in a godly, prudent way.

We see an example of this thorny ground, deceived by riches child of God in the rich, young ruler (Mark 10:17-27). We know this rich, young ruler is a child of God because the Lord loved him (Mark 10:21). He was living a godly life, obeying the ten commandments (all except covetousness); he even had a very good reputation in the community to where even the disciples knew he was a good man. However, this young man was not willing to take up his cross and follow Christ in total devotion because he had great possessions. Therefore, just like we see in 1 Tim. 6:9-10, this young man pierced himself through with many sorrows because of his covetousness of riches. He was sad and went away grieved and sorrowful because he had great possessions (Mark 10:22). Jesus then proclaims to the disciples the severe challenge of those that have riches faithfully pressing into the kingdom of God (Mark 10:23-27). We don’t know anything else about this rich, young ruler except for this brief account. We certainly hope that he went home, repented of his sins, cut out the thorns of riches in his life, and then followed Jesus in good ground discipleship. We hope he did, but we do not know. In this moment, this rich, young ruler was a child of God who had the thorn of the deceitfulness of riches choke out his fruitfulness in the kingdom. We also see the prodigal son enticed by the deceitfulness of riches and squandered the blessings of the Father's house (Luke 15:11-32). We are prone to the same deception if we are not vigilant to remove this thorn.

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The pleasures of this life. (Luke 8:14) The word “pleasures” here essentially means “lusts” or sensual desires. Therefore, we are prone to be enticed with the lust of this world. This world opposed to God is characterized by “*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*” (1 John 2:16). Our flesh lusts to satisfy its pleasure, regardless of the destruction it might leave in its wake in our lives. The world are “*lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God*” (2 Tim. 3:4). No doubt, in our flesh, there is momentary pleasure in sin, but that pleasure in sin will only last for a season (Heb. 11:25). Once the season of pleasure is ceased in sin, then the destruction of indulging in that pleasure will be manifest in the disobedient child of God’s life. There are many thorns of pleasures in this world that can entangle us in sin. Anything our flesh desires that is beyond the commands of God’s word will be detrimental to our fruitfulness in the kingdom. Therefore, we need to cut out these thorns of pleasure in our lives.

The lust of other things. (Mark 4:19) Then, Jesus gives an all-inclusive statement in the final type of thorn. If the cares of this world, or the deceitfulness of riches, or the pleasures of this life have not gotten you, then watch out for “*other things*”. Watch out for anything else in your life that can choke out the perfection of the word in your life. The “other things” we are susceptible to will vary by person. We each have individual besetting sins, thorns that can diminish our fruitfulness in the kingdom. Many of these things are not sinful by themselves – work, family, recreation, sports, etc. However, if these other things distract us from fruitful service to God, then that is a thorn that needs to be purged out.

We are all prone to be choked out with the thorns of this life if we are not diligent to cut back these thorns. Even the Apostle Paul knew he had to keep his own body under subjection lest he should become a castaway (1 Cor. 9:27). There are some children of God who have been so consumed with “thorns and briars”, bearing no fruit, that God deems them fit for the burning of temporal judgment (Heb. 6:8, John 15:2,6). These are children of God who had previously been enlightened, tasted of the heavenly gift, partakers of the Holy Ghost, tasted the good word of the Lord, and tasted the powers of the world to come (Heb. 6:4-5). Unfortunately, they have let “thorns and briars” (Heb. 6:8) quench their fruitfulness in the kingdom. God always gives a space for repentance, but after we continually reject God’s calls for repentance, what is God’s response for the unprofitable branch? “2) *Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away... 6) If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*” (John 15:2-6) Notice, in v.2 this branch is “in me” (in Christ). This is not an unregenerate, false professor that is cast into the fire. This is a branch that is “in Christ” but has become unfruitful. Does God cast them into hell? Who gathers these unprofitable branches and casts them into the fire? Men cast them into the fire. God does not cast his unprofitable branches into hell. No, men cast them into the fire here in time. This is a temporal judgment that is carried out by men, not by God in eternity.

Similar to the unrepentant sinner in 1 Cor. 5:5, sometimes we must deliver the unfruitful child of God over to Satan for the temporal destruction of his flesh so that he will ultimately repent. This just shows how seriously God takes bearing fruit in his kingdom. If we don’t use what God has given us as faithful stewards to his honor and glory, God has the right to take it away. Just like in the parable of the talents, God took away the 1 talent from the unprofitable servant (the unfruitful ground) and gave it to the profitable servant with 10 talents who had already made a 100% return on investment (Matt. 25:14-30). No one is immune from these thorns in their walk of discipleship. Everyone has to deal with the temptations of the cares of this life, covetousness, pleasures, and lust. Yet again, the word of God is how we combat the perils of the thorny ground. Thorns are not fought off or taken away by just doing nothing. If the time comes where we are choked out by thorns, the only way they are going to be removed is by force and with some form of a blade to cut them out and cut the thorns back. We have the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph. 6:17), to cut back the thorns in our lives. The word of God is the remedy for almost every problem of

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the first three unfruitful grounds. Therefore, the way we advance onward to be fruitful in the kingdom is to grow and be strengthened in a manner that we can put off the things and move towards fruitful “perfection” that this group falls short of (Luke 8:14).

The Good Ground

Now, we have arrived at the good ground that brings forth abundant fruit. Even in the good ground, we see varying degrees of fruitfulness among faithful children of God. Some good ground brings forth 30-fold, some 60-fold, and some 100-fold. *“But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”* (Matt. 13:23) Even among the faithful disciples of Christ that consistently bring forth fruit, we can see as well that there are varying degrees of fruit in our churches as well. We certainly need to all strive to bring forth 100-fold good ground fruit to honor our Lord, but unfortunately, sometimes the thorns of this life can diminish our fruitfulness in the kingdom.

What are the characteristics of the good ground that brings forth abundant fruit to the glory of God?

- They *“hear and receive”* the word (Matt. 13:23, Mark 4:20)
- They *“understand”* the word (Matt. 13:23)
- They have *“an honest and good heart”* (Luke 8:15)
- They *“keep”* (continue in) the word (Luke 8:15)
- They bring forth fruit *“with patience”* (Luke 8:15)
- They bring forth fruit *“to perfection”* (Luke 8:14-15); by implication and contrast from the thorny which lack maturity, the good ground’s fruit is mature and strong.

They hear and receive the word. This is not necessarily distinctive from the other 3 unfruitful grounds. All groups hear the word, but the good ground is identified by long-term diligent fruitfulness, not just quick, short-term fruit like the stony ground. Not only do they hear the word, but the good ground is diligent to study and understand the word to stabilize them when tribulation will inevitably come.

They understand the word. The long-term faithfulness of the good ground could be attributed to the fact that they actually “understand” the word of God. The other groups believe the word, but this is the only group that appears to really understand it. The good ground Christians have progressed on from the infant milk of the word and matured to now consume the meat of the word (1 Cor. 3:2, Heb. 5:12). They don’t just understand the meaning of verses, but they apply the word of God in their life.

They have an honest and good heart. Their ground and fruit are good because God has made their heart good. Goodness is a fruit of the Spirit, an attribute of God (Gal. 5:22). The only reason this good ground brings forth fruit is because God has made their heart good in the new birth. Now that they have a good spiritual heart, they can work out the goodness in their life that God has already worked in their heart. Good fruit is always indicative of a good heart from the Lord.

They keep (continue in) the word. These good ground disciples put the word of God into practice in their lives. They “keep” the word. They are not just hearers but also doers of the word (James 1:22). The faithful child of God is not identified by short-term excitement, like the stony ground. The good ground is made by faithful, diligent, long-term obedience in keeping the word of God by our actions in our lives. God is honored when we are faithful to not just obey once, but we diligently “keep” the word over the course of our life of discipleship.

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They bring forth fruit with patience. It takes a great deal of patience to persevere through the tribulations that choked out the stony ground and be diligent to fight off the thorns in the thorny ground. We must be very patient and faithfully endure these inevitable troubles if we are going to bring forth the proper abundant fruit. This good ground also brings forth fruit *“to perfection”* (Luke 8:14-15). By implication and contrast from the thorny which lack maturity, the good ground’s fruit is mature and strong. They bring forth fruit with patience and are mature and strong in the Lord.

God is glorified when we *“bear much fruit”* (John 15:8). Therefore, we all need to be progressing on towards 100-fold good ground discipleship. We don’t need to be satisfied with where we are in our discipleship. We can always bring forth more fruit to the glory of God. There are things that can diminish our fruitfulness from time to time, even in the good ground. Our productivity may periodically reduce from 60-fold back down to 30-fold. However, we always need to be pressing on towards greater fruitfulness in the kingdom to honor our Lord with “much fruit”.

Those Who Hear Not the Word

Since Jesus limited this parable to those who hear the word, by implication there is also a group who do not hear the word of God. *“If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.”* (Mark 4:23) Not everyone has the spiritual ears to hear the spiritual lesson of Jesus Christ. Notice, Jesus says “if” any man has ears to hear. Therefore, there are some that do not have ears to hear the teachings of Jesus in this parable. This implicitly teaches a group which cannot hear the word of God when it is preached (sown) by the minister. Only those with “ears to hear” can hear (Matt. 13:9,16); the unregenerate cannot hear the spiritual words of Jesus; they don’t have the ability to hear because they haven’t been given the ears to hear, nor the heart to understand. Remember, the word of God is not given for the world, but the scriptures are only applicable or relevant to the man of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It takes a spiritual heart to receive the word of God because spiritual things cannot be received by the natural man; they are only foolishness unto him (1 Cor. 2:14). Furthermore, specifically, the gospel is foolishness to *“them that perish”* (1 Cor. 1:18).

Why is it that some people have no desire or response to the word of God? Because they cannot understand the speech or words of Jesus. *“Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.”* (John 8:43) These were unregenerate men who “cannot hear my word”. They could physically hear his words in their natural ears. However, they could not hear his words “in their heart” because they had a hard and stony heart that was dead in sins. The goats cannot hear the spiritual voice of Jesus; only the sheep hear the Shepherd’s voice (John 10:25-28). Therefore, we don’t need to be overly discouraged if we receive hostile responses to the word of God; Jesus did, the apostles did, and if we are faithful to preach the word, we will receive hostile responses from the unregenerate too. These are men that are only *“cut to”* the heart by the word (Acts 5:33, 7:54), and never *“pricked in”* the heart (Acts 2:37). Let us faithfully sow the word of God indiscriminately, but also keep in mind that some cannot hear the word and will most likely be openly hostile to the preaching of the word.

Conclusion

God expects abundant fruit from his children. There are many obstacles that can prevent us from bringing forth abundant fruit to glorify God: Satan, tribulation, and the various thorns of this world. We can use the word of God to fight Satan, conquer tribulation, and cut down the thorns encroaching upon us. If we are faithful in discipleship and bring forth fruit, God will inevitably give us more opportunities and responsibility to honor him in the future. *“24) And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. 25) For he that hath, to him*

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shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath." (Mark 4:24-25) Think about the parable of the talents. God took away the 1 talent from the unprofitable servant (the unfruitful branch) and gave it to the profitable servant with 10 talents who had already made a 100% return on investment (Matt. 25:14-30). If we are faithful with what God has already given us, the Lord will typically bless us with more to honor him with.

We do not need to be satisfied in our fruit-bearing. We all need to be pressing towards 100-fold fruit bearing in our life. We need to be pressing forward toward the prize of the high calling of God. *"13) Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14) I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. 15) Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you."* (Phil. 3:13-15) Part of the problem with the thorny ground, was not that they never bore fruit, but that they ceased to bring forth fruit "to perfection". Paul is exhorting the church to press toward "perfection", maturity in their walk of discipleship. The main problem with the 3 unfruitful grounds was that they did not understand or keep the word of God. We must know but also obey God's word. We are stabilized when we grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. *"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen."* (2 Pet. 3:18) We must grow in understanding the word of God, and then we will bring forth abundant fruit to the glory of God.