

The
PARABLE
of the
SOWER



INTRODUCTION

Jesus' parables are some of the most famous and influential stories in history. Even those who do not know much about Jesus are often familiar with phrases like "*prodigal*" or "*good Samaritan*." A master storyteller, **Jesus used parables to teach powerful lessons about life and God.** The parables are simple stories with intent. These stories make up about 35% of His teachings and, while simple on the surface, they bear profound and enduring meaning. Around 40 parables are recorded in the gospels, highlighting their importance. Like a lamp set upon a hill, these teachings shine forth as beacons of our Lord's wisdom, continuing to illuminate hearts and transform lives.

The word "*parable*" comes from a Greek term meaning "*to set alongside*." Parables are stories placed alongside Jesus' message about the Kingdom of God. They are not just moral lessons but "***earthly stories with heavenly meanings.***" Parables aim to awaken understanding, challenge the conscience, and inspire action.

Jesus' parables are purposeful because they act as prophetic tools, delivering a message from God. They work like a lens, helping people see the truth and correct their perspective. **Biblical parables reveal who God is, how God acts, and what humanity can be.** After Jesus' resurrection, parables became less common, replaced by more direct ways of sharing the gospel.

Why Jesus spoke in Parables?

Jesus frequently used parables as a form of indirect communication to challenge the complacent, confuse those opposed to Him, and bring hope to the humble. Parables both conceal and reveal truths, often uncovering what was previously hidden. For example, His disciples would seek explanations for the parables, and Jesus would clarify their meanings for them (Matthew 13:18). In contrast, the Pharisees understood some parables and, feeling threatened, sought to crucify Him (Matthew 21:45).



Matthew 13:13 – 15, *“This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. ¹⁴In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. ¹⁵For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.”*

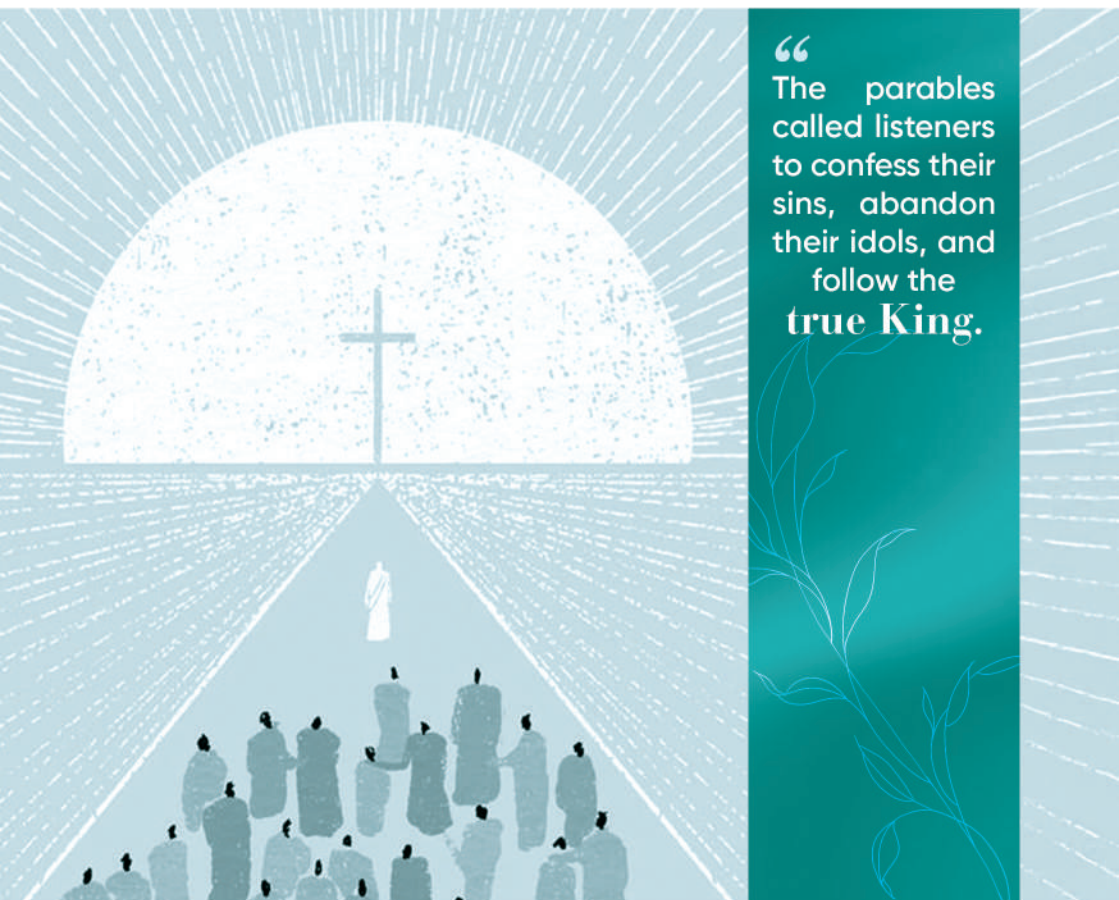
Matthew 13:14-15 quotes Isaiah 6:9-10. By the time we arrive at Isaiah chapter 6, it becomes evident that the people stand accused of turning to false gods and forsaking the one true God. When God sends Isaiah to deliver His message, He is not causing Israel to sin but confirming their repeated choice to reject Him.

When Jesus quotes this passage, He seems to compare His ministry of teaching in parables to Isaiah's mission. Like Isaiah, Jesus confirms the hard-heartedness of those who refuse to listen. **The parables were a way to reveal that God's kingdom had arrived. Jesus brought the kingdom in a way that was surprising to everyone—both Israel's leaders and the common people.**

By speaking in parables, Jesus identified Himself as a prophet to Israel, declaring, *"One greater than Isaiah is here! Listen to Him."*

- Jesus understood that many would disregard or resist His message, just as the prophets before Him had been rejected. However, He did not use parables to exclude anyone. Those who were eager to understand, like the disciples, could stay back and ask him the meaning of the parables.
- Through parables, Jesus revealed the idolatry of God's people more powerfully than the prophets before Him. Parables explained the nature of God's Kingdom. **To open-hearted listeners, the parables revealed truths about the Kingdom. To those unwilling to hear, they concealed these truths.**

- Parables were not just stories about the Kingdom; they were tools to bring the Kingdom to life. They showed how God's Kingdom works through forgiveness, generosity, love, and humility—values that challenge worldly ways. **They weren't just lessons about God's Kingdom but invitations to enter it.** When Paul faced rejection of the message of God's Kingdom in Acts 28, he quoted Isaiah 6 to rebuke those who refused to listen. He then declared that God's salvation had been sent to the Gentiles, who would listen (Acts 28:28).



“
The parables
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sins, abandon
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The Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13:1-9, *“On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. ²And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. ³Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: “Behold, a Sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵Some 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. ⁷And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. ⁸But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”*

Matthew 13:18-23, *“Therefore hear the parable of the Sower: ¹⁹When 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. ²⁰But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet 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. ²²Now 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. ²³But 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.”*

INTRODUCTION

The Parable of the Sower holds a central place in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke (Matthew 13:1-52, Mark 4:1-34, Luke 8:1-18). It is unique because Jesus provides a detailed interpretation, earning it the title *"The Parable about the Parables."*

This parable illustrates the various ways people respond to hearing God's word, echoing the reactions Jesus encountered during His ministry. It serves as both a warning against superficial listening and an encouragement for genuine, fruitful hearing. True hearing involves obedience, as the Hebrew word for "hear" (*šāma*) is often translated as "obey" in English.

Mark brings out the theme of "hearing" a bit more clearly.

Mark 4:23-25, *"If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear."* ²⁴
"Consider carefully what you hear," He continued. "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more." ²⁵*Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them."*

The principle of *"with the measure you use, it will be measured to you"* is about people who responded to the parables by drawing closer to Jesus and seeking understanding. They received deeper insights and explanations about the Kingdom. However, those who listened superficially gained no deeper understanding or revelation. For those with shallow hearing, even what they initially heard had no lasting

impact. Their lack of openness prevented them from experiencing deeper spiritual transformation.

For all three Gospel writers, this parable is key to understanding the Kingdom of God. It highlights three main points:

1. The Kingdom of God is centered on the Word. It involves a message about God's purposes and actions. This message, proclaimed by Jesus, declares that the Kingdom of God is near.
2. The Kingdom challenges people to reorient their lives according to God's Word.
3. The Kingdom is active today, and people must listen and respond by living lives that "bear fruit." Spiritual growth requires a willingness to listen, practicing the discipline of attentive hearing, and responding to God's Word by putting it into daily practice.

What is the Kingdom of God?

The Kingdom of God is where God reigns and offers everyone to live under His reign. It is not just a distant heavenly reality but something accessible and transformative in the here and now. Luke 17:21, *"the Kingdom of God is among you."*

Although God reigns sovereignly over all creation, humans, with their gift of free will, must choose to welcome His rule into their lives by praying, *"Your kingdom come."*

The Kingdom of God is not just a future promise. It is a present reality we can live out today. This happens when we surrender to His presence and authority. We reflect His will on earth through our actions and character. When Jesus said, **"My kingdom is not of this world"** (John 18:36), He was making a profound statement about the nature of His Kingdom.

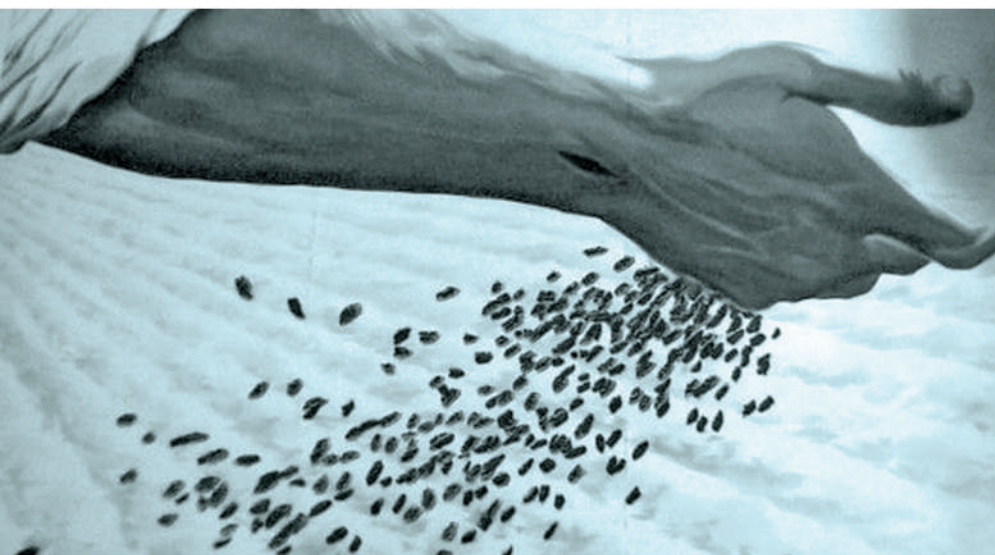
Jesus was clarifying that His Kingdom is not a political or earthly kingdom like those of human rulers. His statement emphasized that His mission was not to overthrow earthly governments but to establish God's reign in the hearts and lives of people by operating through the truth, love, and justice of God's Kingdom values. In essence, the Kingdom of God is a dynamic and transformative truth, encompassing God's presence and purpose in the world now and a future reality where all things are made new under His reign.

The Sower, The Seed and The Soils

THE SOWER

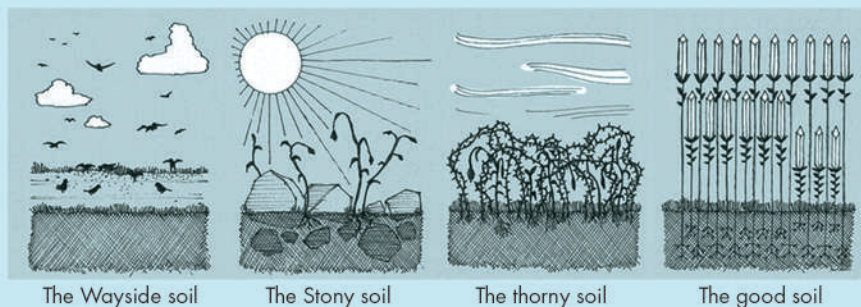
Jesus begins the parable with the words, *“The Sower went out to sow. As he sowed...”* (Matthew 13:3-4). He even refers to it as *“the parable of the Sower”* (Matthew 13:18).

To understand the parable, we must first identify who the Sower is. **The Sower is Jesus.** His ministry is like sowing seeds to bring heaven’s harvest to earth. While the story involves different types of soil, the focus is not on the soils but on the Sower and His generous sowing.



In the Old Testament, God is often depicted as a Sower. He plants His people, Israel, despite their rebellion, showing His faithfulness and grace. Unlike ordinary farmers who carefully choose where to plant,

God scatters seeds abundantly and indiscriminately—on rocky, hard, shallow, and thorny ground alike. This reflects God’s hope and belief in potential even where growth seems unlikely.



Old Testament Examples of God as the Sower:

- **Isaiah 27:6:** *“Jacob will take root and fill the earth with fruit.”*
- **Isaiah 60:21:** *“Your people will all be righteous; they will possess the land forever. They are the shoot that I planted...”*
- **Jeremiah 24:5-7:** *“I will regard as good the exiles from Judah... I will plant them... I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD.”*
- **Zechariah 8:12:** *“The seed will be prosperous, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will yield its produce, and the skies will give their dew. To the remnant of this people, I will give all these things as an inheritance.”*

This parable reveals a God who sows with generosity and hope, planting seeds of the Kingdom in every place, even in the most unpromising conditions.

THE SEED

- **God's Word as the Seed**

The seed in the parable represents God's Word—the **message of His Kingdom** (Matthew 13:19). Throughout the Gospels, Jesus proclaims the arrival of God's Kingdom, and Mark highlights that the key to life in this Kingdom is the Word (Mark 4:14), sown into the hearts of people. Despite the sin and brokenness in the world, God's Word, like the Word that shaped creation, brings life and fruitfulness to those who believe and obey.

Isaiah 55:10-11, "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

- **Jesus as the Seed**

Jesus is not only the Sower but also the Seed:

- **Seed of the Woman:** Jesus bruises Satan, defeats evil, and delivers humanity from sin (Genesis 3:15).
- **Seed of Abraham:** Jesus empowers His followers to carry God's Kingdom to all nations (Galatians 3:16).
- **Seed of David:** Jesus establishes His Kingdom, transforms hearts, and builds the Church, His dwelling among His people (2 Samuel 7:12, Revelation 5:10).

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus becomes the seed that falls to the ground and dies to produce a great harvest (John 12:24-25). His sacrifice leads to eternal life for those who believe and makes them fruitful.



■ The Seed's Potential

Though small and seemingly insignificant, the seed holds incredible potential. Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed—starting small but growing into something great and transformative, challenging worldly ways and bringing renewal (Matthew 13:31-32).

■ Good Seed vs. Bad Seed

In the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30, 37-43), Jesus explains that the Kingdom includes both good and bad growing together.

- **Good seeds** are those who follow God and live righteously.
- **Weeds** represent those who oppose God or live in rebellion.

God, the farmer, allows both to grow for a time, showing His patience and giving everyone the chance to change. At the harvest—the final judgment—there will be a separation: the wheat (the faithful) will be gathered and rewarded, while the weeds (the wicked) will face judgment.

THE SOILS

The soils in this parable represent the condition of the human heart, and the effect of God's Word depends on how the heart receives it.



1. **The Wayside soil – A Hard Heart** **(Matthew 13:4,19)**

The wayside soil represents hard-hearted people who never respond to the words of Jesus. Jesus reveals how the lack of “*understanding the word of the kingdom*” is the primary reason for the hardness of heart. And Satan comes to snatch the truth that is sown into their life because they didn't allow the truth to penetrate their heart.

Causes of a Hard Heart:

- **Sin and Worldliness:** Sin hardens the heart by convincing us that God's ways are not fulfilling (Ephesians 4:17-19).
- **Pride and Idolatry:** Trusting in wealth, power, or personal desires blinds people to God's truth (Romans 1:22-23).
- **Disappointments and Pain:** Repeated hurts can lead to a guarded heart that even excludes God (Psalm 75:21-22).

*Anyone's heart can become hardened, including faithful Christians. In Mark 8:17–19, even Jesus' disciples displayed this condition. They were preoccupied with their lack of bread, forgetting that Jesus had just miraculously fed thousands with only a few loaves. Jesus questioned them about the hardness of their hearts, highlighting its symptoms: *an inability to see, understand, hear, and remember spiritual truths.**

Receive a new heart today! Overcoming a hardened heart is ultimately the work of God—a miracle and a gift that only He can provide. We must ask Him for it. This promise is fulfilled in the new covenant through Jesus, who shed His blood for sinners.

Ezekiel 36:26-27, "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh [that is, a tender heart that can feel, can be touched]. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."

2. The Stony soil – A Shallow Heart – (Matthew 13:5-6, 20-21)

The shallow heart in the Parable of the Sower is represented by the seed that falls on ground with stones. It sprouts quickly but withers under the sun because it

A Biblical meaning of Heart.

To many, the "heart" primarily refers to emotions. However, the Bible presents a broader view, describing the heart as the source of emotions, thoughts (Genesis 6:5; Proverbs 23:7; Daniel 2:30), and will—our plans and decisions (Proverbs 16:1,9; Matthew 12:33-34). This may seem confusing until we understand that the Bible's perspective on human nature is revolutionary and distinct from other worldviews.

In Scripture, the heart symbolizes the core of our being—our deepest commitments and ultimate orientation. It reflects what we trust, love, and hope in most (Proverbs 3:5; 23:26), what we treasure, and what captures our imagination (Matthew 6:21). Every heart is directed toward something (Genesis 6:5), and its direction governs our thoughts, emotions, and actions. What we love most shapes what we find reasonable, desirable, and possible. Whatever we cherish ultimately controls us.

This is why Jesus is deeply concerned about our hearts. God looks beyond outward appearances and focuses on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Jeremiah 17:10). The prophets spoke of salvation as more than compliance—it is about having God's law "written on the heart" through spiritual transformation (Jeremiah 31:33). Ultimately, we follow what the heart desires most, determining the course of our lives.

no deep roots. This describes people who initially receive God's word with joy but lack depth and commitment, so their faith falters when difficulties or challenges arise.

- A shallow heart may be emotionally responsive but unwilling to fully commit or go deeper into spiritual growth, reflection, or change.
- They focus on surface-level benefits, such as enjoying the forgiveness of sins or relief from guilt and shame, seeking material blessings instead of cultivating a personal and interactive relationship with God and His Kingdom (**Matthew 15:8**). They may feel uplifted during Sunday services but avoid the deeper challenges of spiritual growth, like enduring trials, developing spiritual habits, and embracing the path of surrender and discipleship. **James 1:2-3** encourages believers to trust God during trials, persevere, and allow their faith to develop character.
- The shallow heart cannot withstand difficulties, temptations, or opposition. Without deep roots, faith withers when tested. Similar to plants without sufficient soil, their spiritual life cannot draw nourishment from God's Word to sustain them.

Colossians 2:6-7, *"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."*

The depth of your roots determines the strength and fruitfulness of your shoots. To overcome this, invest in cultivating deep, resilient faith that can thrive in all seasons. *"They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do."* (**Psalm 1:3**)

3. The Thorny Soil – A Divided Heart – (Matthew 13:7, 22)

The thorny soil represents people who hear God’s Word but whose faith is stifled by life’s worries, the allure of riches, and the pursuit of pleasures. This soil symbolizes a divided heart—a heart torn between worldly concerns and spiritual priorities. Attempting to balance faith with worldly distractions prevents harmonious spiritual growth.

What Are the Thorns Jesus Described?

1. **Worries of Life:** Concerns over daily needs, uncertainties, or global challenges like wars, economic instability, and social tensions (Matthew 13:22).
2. **Deceitfulness of Riches:** The false sense of security, power, or worth that wealth seems to offer, drawing reliance away from God (Matthew 13:22).

Idols of the Heart

The “*Idols of the heart*” refers to anything that takes the place of Jesus Christ as the ultimate focus of trust, devotion, and priority in a person’s life. Idolatry is not limited to physical objects or statues but includes desires, ambitions, or even good things that become ultimate in our hearts. An idol is anything besides Christ that captures our heart’s loyalty, service, or delight.

Identifying idols is essential for spiritual growth. Questions like “*Why am I so angry?*” or “*Why am I so anxious or depressed?*” can help uncover hidden idols that drive our emotions and behaviours. Idols are deceptive, often promising happiness, fulfillment, or security, but ultimately leading to spiritual emptiness and bondage. They demand our dependence and loyalty, diverting our devotion away from God. Scripture warns against the dangers of idols, showing how they can ensnare the heart and prevent a full relationship with God.

Overcoming idols requires repentance and faith. Continuous self-examination and turning away from idols help believers grow spiritually. Removing idols allows for greater joy and love as believers place their ultimate trust and devotion in Christ alone. The call for each one of us today is to examine the heart, identify idols, and replace them with a wholehearted focus on Jesus, enabling a deeper and more fruitful relationship with God.

3. Pleasures of Life: A preoccupation with temporary enjoyment and comfort that leaves no room for spiritual growth (Mark 4:19, Luke 8:14).

Jesus identified these as “*thorns*” because they preoccupy the mind and prevent His Word from taking root and bearing fruit. While riches and pleasures are not inherently evil, their danger lies in how they deceive us into trusting them instead of God. Worry, likewise, keeps us anxious and distracted from God’s provision.

Jesus’ Teaching on These Thorns

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus directly addresses these thorns:

- **Matthew 6:25**, *“Do not worry about your life...”*
- **Matthew 6:21**, *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*
- **Matthew 6:24**, *“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”*
- **Matthew 6:33**, *“Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

While Jesus does not condemn all earthly enjoyment, He warns against allowing worldly pleasures to dominate our hearts. Jesus calls us to prioritize God’s Kingdom and righteousness above all else. **Worldly pleasures become “*thorns*” when they compete with our devotion to God, distracting us from the life He calls us to live.**

4. The Good Soil – A Good Heart - (Matthew 13:8)

Good soil represents a heart that is open, receptive, and obedient to God's Word. Just as fertile ground allows seeds to grow and produce a harvest, a good heart allows God's Word to transform a life, resulting in abundant spiritual fruit.

The good soil in the Parable of the Sower highlights the importance of not just hearing God's Word but understanding it and responding to it through fruitful living. As Jesus said in John 15:8: *"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."*

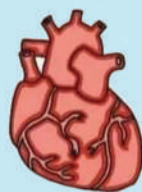
The failed sowings in the parable represent people who respond positively to the message at first but with a superficial hearing. Even receiving the Word with joy is insufficient if it does not take deep root and transforms the whole person. Good soil signifies a life transformed by God's Word, producing godly qualities like *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* (Galatians 5:22-23). It also involves sharing God's truth and expanding His Kingdom. Faith that is temporary or unproductive is not true faith (James 2:14). Hearing God's Word without it leading to a productive and



godly life is not genuine hearing.

Luke 8:18 says, *“Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him.”* This teaches us to be intentional and careful in how we listen to God’s Word. True repentance is shown through humble listening and a willingness to do the Father’s will, placing us in a position to receive deeper revelation from Jesus.

If someone identifies with any of the first three types of soil in the parable, it doesn’t mean their hearts are unchangeable. Jesus did not suggest that hearts are permanently fixed. There is always hope for transformation—for ourselves and for others. What someone couldn’t accept or understand yesterday, they may be ready to receive today.



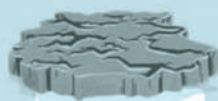
Only God
can change a
heart of stone

The Sower

SOWER
The Savior and
His servants

SEEDS
The word
of God

**SPREAD TO DIFFERENT
TYPES OF GROUND**



WAYSIDE

Hard heart,
unprepared, no desire
for righteousness



**FOWLS DEVOURD
SEEDS**



STONY GROUND

No root in the gospel,
no conversion



**SPRUNG UP, WERE
SCORCHED, WITHERED**



THORNS

Cares of the world,
deceitfulness of riches



WERE CHOKED



GOOD GROUND

Honest and good heart,
converted



BROUGHT FORTH FRUIT

Conclusion

The parable emphasizes the importance of actively hearing, understanding, and responding to Jesus' message. Jesus says, *"To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables"* (Mark 4:11). This highlights that Jesus reveals truth to those who are genuinely seeking it and willing to pursue it wholeheartedly. While not everyone who came to Him was truly interested in discipleship, Jesus used parables to invite those with a sincere desire for truth to go deeper in their understanding. Parables became a way to draw in those with open hearts and a longing to know God deeply.



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