



Share a story about your experiences growing things.

(What kind of seed did you use? What kind of soil did you plant in? Did you plant in a garden? A bucket? Find something growing wild? Would you consider yourself a successful sower of seed in the physical sense? Maybe a good measurement is, "were you able to eat anything that you grew?" or "did the plants look pretty" - if they are non-fruit bearing plants.)

Let's take a look at The Parable of the Sower (or the Parable of the Soils)

This is the parable - "And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold."

This is the explanation of the parable - "As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear. "And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.' Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience. "No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.""

What are some of the things you hear on a daily basis? (podcasts, news, water cooler talk, etc.) Take an average day and have people reflect out loud on the type of things they hear.

How are you hearing the Word of God? Ask people to respond honestly if they only hear the Word of God once or twice a week.

In the parable of the soils here the assumption is that the Word of God is being declared. Jesus is speaking the true gospel and the parable here focuses on the hearers – basically, how is the truth of God being received?

How does Jesus say you hear? Hearing with the heart. What do you think it means for us to hear with our heart? What might be the danger of not allowing the truth to be heard in our hearts? If we are only hearing God's Word once or twice in a week (as opposed to hearing other things throughout the week not based on God's Word) then it might be a good time to change what we hear.

Notice that all of the soils here with their ears but do they do not all hear with their hearts.

Allow the group to point out the four types of “heart-ears” mentioned in the passage -

1. The hard heart - the ones along the path (the Word is never received - an example would be Simon the Pharisee that we looked at last week)
2. Shallow heart - rocky and no root - they have no depth when suffering shows up - it's too hard and costs too much (many in the crowd were like this – they heard or listened from a distance but went away and did not follow)
3. Distracted heart - thorny and choked out - get enamored with the world and the fruit does not mature (the rich, young ruler and Judas)
4. Fruitful heart - good soil and grew and yielded 100 fold - hear the Word and hold it fast and bear fruit with patience (the women in Luke 8, the disciples) – these are not perfect people, just people who continue to surrender to His faithfulness.

Ask, What type of heart do I see in me?

Hear the truth week after week and continue to reject it.

Hear the truth and respond quickly and tough times lead you away.

Hear the truth and I get distracted and other things become more important. I mean life is busy!

Hear the truth and cling to the words of life and fruit matures. It is a constant surrender.

How can I really hear? The difference can only be seen over time with 2-4. There is no instant discipleship. You cannot microwave spiritual maturity and the path at times is definitely not in a straight line. At times, it seems it is 3 steps forward and 2 steps back but the goal is constant surrender. Not an easy task, and also not impossible with the power of the Holy Spirit leading and working inside of us.

It is a constant following not just a one-time instance.

A good book to recommend to the group is *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, Eugene Peterson.

We have all had that “one moment of sin” but that does not determine our destiny.

That one moment of obedience does not dictate the trajectory either, but a moment after moment surrender to the will of the Father.

What kind of fruit should this produce?

1. Faithfulness over time - this protects us from the hypocrisy of immediate appearance and external results. (The fake grows faster than the good stuff) (The sower and the seed are not the issue - what is the state of your soil?) Shining a light of what Jesus is teaching you? Are you making disciples?
2. Humility - protect from arrogance of thinking we can change people with our words or abilities. (Nothing that we can manufacture)
3. Encouragement- protect from discouragement when many people don't respond with lasting change. Keep speaking the Word. There is a freedom in trusting Him
4. Showing/sharing/giving - protect from being a consumer only - don't just accept the seed and not share it.

Thankfully we are not soil, we are people and God is God and we are not. Here is what God is willing to do in us -

God changes hard hearts.

God depends shallow hearts.

God focuses distracted hearts.
God sustains and produces fruit in the faithful.

v. 10 - God has to give you a soft heart and it's your responsibility to hear and allow Him to transform your heart.

Read *Ezekiel 37:1-14* if you choose. A beautiful Old Testament of the transforming power of God. These dead, dry bones can live again. God breathes life into our very beings. Remember that God came to bring dead people back to life.

Take time to share prayer requests and pray together. Allow