

## How to Cultivate Good Soil

Luke 8:15

July 29, 2018

Grab your Bibles, turn to the 8th chapter of Luke. As we have been doing in this study of the parable of the soils, let's read the parable again, along with its explanation. You'll find that located there in Luke Chapter 8, verses 4-15. "And when a great crowd was gathering, and people from town after town came to him," that is, Jesus, "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 the thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.' As he said these things he called out, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'

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"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, and 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're 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.'"

Up to this point, we've been talking about the bad soils, the bad soils that are rejecting, or fruitless, unproductive.

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And we started by reading the parable, understanding Jesus' reason for speaking to the crowds in parables. And then we just walked through these soils, so to speak, walking through soil, walking through the dirt, starting with the hard-packed soil of bad religion, and then through the rocky and thorny soils of fruitless religion. Today we get a look at the good soil. After the warnings Jesus gave with the other three soils, today we're going to learn what makes good soil good.

What makes good soil good? We're gonna think about the importance and the significance of fruitfulness. And as we think about the importance of fruitfulness, it's gonna give us the motivation that we need to cultivate fruitfulness in our own Christian lives. So we've identified, Jesus identified for us, that the seed is the Word of God. We understand that the sower is anyone who spreads God's Word, starting with the great sower himself, Jesus Christ. And then the soils are pictures of different kinds of hearers, different hearts that either receive, or reject, or whatever, the seed of the Word of God.

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So as we consider here for this morning in Luke 8, verse 15, as we consider the good soil, what I want you to see today is the necessity of a good heart for bearing fruit. I want you to see the necessity of a good heart for bearing fruit, so that you will be diligent to cultivate your heart in the fear of God, with a view to finding joy in God. That's consistent with Proverbs 4:23 that tells us, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs," or the issues, "of life."

You can see there in your bulletin that we're gonna ask and answer three questions this morning, starting with this first question, number one: What makes good soil fruitful? What makes good soil fruitful? Or we could ask it this way: What makes good soil good? Ask a farmer. Farmers know what makes good soil good. They know what it takes to make crops grow to maturity. They know what it takes to ensure the greatest productivity, the highest yield, the most abundant fruitfulness possible.

I didn't know, so I had to look it up. Uh, s, soil, Uh, I didn't know this, but, uh, it helps me to understand a little

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bit better, soil's a mix of inorganic materials or minerals, and organic matter. What's organic matter? Dead stuff, stuff that has died. So decaying plant and animal carcasses in the soil at various, various stages of decomposition, soil microorganisms that are in there breaking things down, all that is in the soil that, well, really grows our food. In addition to inorganic minerals, and then that organic matter, soil also contains air and water. All soils contain those four elements: minerals, that organic matter, dead stuff, air, and water.

Good soil is called loam: L-O-A-M, loam. Loam is good because of the proportion of the various things in the soil, the proportion of its constituent parts which are sand, silt, and clay. Sand, silt, and clay are in all soil. Sand particles in the soil are larger, obviously, they're larger, and they allow for good aeration. Clay particles are smaller, more compact, but they're high in mineral nutrients. Silt, that's the medium-sized particles, and that brings the sand and the clay together. So to get good loam-quality soil, you need to have almost equal parts of the sand and the silt, aeration and minerals, a little less clay.

And the result of the right percentages of sand, silt, and clay creates this loam soil, rich soil. It's not, uh, the soil isn't so porous that water runs through it so fast that the plants can't make use of it. The soil isn't so compact that it becomes waterlogged and soggy. Good loam soil allows plants to dig down, develop roots that auger in deeply, that anchor in firmly. And the roots are necessary to take in the soil's nutrients, the minerals like nitrogen, calcium, potassium, other minerals, as well as what they benefit from in that organic matter, that organic material. That good loam soil provides the plant with sufficient access to water, water that moves through the soil fast enough to prevent saturation, but also slow enough to allow the roots to drink and take in its benefits.

First three soils in Jesus' parables, just Jesus' parable here, they may have all had these loam-like qualities. But there are reasons that that soil was unable to sustain growth to maturity and to fruitfulness. Consider the first soil, the hard-packed soil. That soil was packed down hard, which means it, effectively, it squeezes out the air and the water out of the soil. The seed cannot penetrate, which means it can't germinate

and even begin to grow. The hard-packed soil is impenetrable, therefore, unproductive.

Second soil, rocky soil's, too shallow. It's, it's got that rock, that limestone layer underneath, and so the roots can't develop. So the seed may germinate and, and grow some roots, but the roots are hindered from growing deeply by that rock layer beneath. The plants then grow a little bit below the surface, mostly above the surface, all the energy going up, but the lack of a sufficient root system means that there's not enough water, which means that they're gonna burn up in the noontday sun. Rocky soil is too shallow to bear any fruit.

It's a, third soil, That may be rich in loamy soil, but the presence of weeds means that weeds take up all the nutrients. They gobble up everything, leaving nothing for those starving plants. The thorny soil is a suffocating soil, growing up with the plants, but choking them out over the time of their existence.

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Then the fourth soil, the good soil. Not only is it rich and loamy, but it's also not hard-packed. It's not shallow because of that limestone rock bed. It's not filled with suffocating thorns. The good soil is not hard like the first. It's not shallow like the second, and it's not unclean like the third. The good soil, instead, is the opposite. It's soft, it's deep, and it's pure. Soft, deep, and pure.

The soil is soft. It's able to receive the seed. It's able to give sufficient access to the nutrients, the air, the water. It's deep. So it's capable of developing a very healthy root system to make use of all those nutrients, and air, and water. It's also pure, free from the seeds and, and the weeds, and the influence of noxious, life-stealing weeds.

With that in mind, look again at verse 15, and let's look at the heart that's pictured by that soft, deep, and pure soil. Three, you can write down three sub-points, jot down in your notes, it's, good soil is, number one: soft, number two: deep, and number three: pure. Jesus said, there in verse 15, "As for that in the good soil, they," those are the seeds who, the



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people, "who, hearing the Word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience." These are the hearts that "hear the Word of God and hold fast to the Word of God in an honest and good heart," and then, "bear fruit with patience," or another word is endurance.

First of all, first sub-point: The good soil is soft soil. The good soil heart is soft. It's pliable toward God. Notice, it's a heart that, holds fast, to the Word of God. It says, it says, In, "in an honest and good heart." The verb tense, there, for, holding fast the Word, it's exactly how it sounds, holding onto it, gripping onto it. But the, the verb tense of, holding fast the Word, is in the present tense, which means that the kind of action that we're talking about here, of holding fast, is a continuous thing. It's not holding fast one time, and then letting go. It's holding fast continually. This is someone characterized by repeatedly, continuously clinging to God's Word.

That's in complete contrast, isn't it, to the hard-soil heart described in verse 5 and verse 12, one, one that repels

the Word. This is the one heart, that hard-packed heart, in which the devil is active. As Jesus said in verse 12, "The devil comes and takes away," or snatches away, "the Word from their hearts." 1 Timothy 4:1, "The Spirit expressly says that in the latter times, some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons." The teaching of demons, the deceitful spirit, Satan, the devil himself, pictured as it says in verse 5 as "birds of the air," that, "come and snatch the seed." They do so by means of false doctrine, creating false, counterfeit forms of Christianity or God's true religion. The hard-soil heart, that's one devoted to bad religion, and particularly false forms of Christianity, sub-Christianity. The devil is at his cleverish and fiendish best when he is closely counterfeiting the Christian faith.

But the good soil, the good soil heart is one that is characterized by a softness toward God. By an eagerness to hear God's Word, an eagerness to respond to that Word in faith and obedience. This is a heart that embraces the Word, like a good soil embraces seed and clings to it no matter what, holds onto it.

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The word, hold fast, *katecho*, which is often used in the New Testament, of believers holding fast and never letting go, to sound biblical doctrine. Paul says, "Hold fast" the Apostolic traditions that he gave: patterns, forms of worship, ways of thinking, worldview, understanding, directly from God's Word. 1 Corinthians 11:2, "Hold fast to the traditions as I delivered them to you." Hold fast the Gospel message itself, 1 Corinthians 15:2. "Hold fast the true prophetic Word," 1 Thessalonians 5:21. "Hold fast the profession, the confession of our faith," Hebrews 10:23, "without wavering." Only those with soft hearts toward God hold fast to his Word like that. So, good soil is the first, soft, a good soil is the first soft, pliable heart toward God and his Word. It's a heart that does not reject God's word, but holds fast to it and keeps on holding fast to it.

Second soil: good soil heart is deep soil. Deep soil. It's able to support deep roots that cause a plant to grow strong even in the hot, blazing sun. Think about the hot, blazing sun of the Middle East. Instead of withering away under the, under the heat of testing, the good soil heart bears fruit for a long time, even in affliction; even in testing, it holds it fast with endurance, persevering under trial.

A text in the ESV says, in verse 15, "Bear fruit with patience." Patience is probably not the best way to translate the Greek word here. The word *makrothumia* is patience, but this is *hypomene*, which means endurance, which means perseverance, which means lasting under testing. Patience is definitely a part of enduring and persevering, but it is not the key sense in the text. The issue is enduring through trial, enduring when the heat is on.

And the contrast that Jesus is picturing here is with those who hear the Word in verse 13, those who "hear the Word and receive it with joy, but because they have no root, though they do believe for a little while, in time of testing they fall away." That's the word, apostatize. They apostatize. They depart from the faith under testing. So the contrast that Jesus is trying to show here is between those who fall away under testing, and those who are characterized by passing the test, enduring through the test, persevering through it. Even under testing, the good-soil heart has deep soil. Deep roots grow, allowing it to bear fruit with endurance, to persevere under testing.

How does that look in the life of a Christian? We're talking about a heart that's not superficial. It's not flippant. It's a heart that is deep and thoughtful, a heart that's reflective and meditative. This is somebody who takes the time and invest whatever energy necessary to do the hard heart work. The spade work to go down deep, and do the hard work of self-examination. It's because of the depth of reflection that this person digs deeply, takes God's Word seriously, holds fast to it, with a depth of faith that we call conviction. Conviction. It's out of that conviction, which is like that taproot that's anchored into and drives through the bedrock. Emotions, godly affections grow up out of that, like shoots growing up toward the sun.

There are positive emotions like love for God, love of holiness, holy living, love for God's people, love for Christ and his Church. All that grows through someone who digs deeply. There're also negative emotions, negative affections. The zeal for holiness produces a counter corresponding hatred for sin, and anger over all that that offends God. And therefore there's a desire for self-denial. There is an aggressive posture towards

sin in one's own life, to aggressively mortify sin. Zeal for God creates a hatred of all that offends God, all that blasphemes and slanders him, like, like fruitless Christianity. So the good soil heart is soft. Holds fast to God's word. The good soil heart is deep, bearing fruit with endurance even during times of testing.

Third sub-point: the good soil heart is pure. It's pure. It's free of the thorns that suffocate a plant, that choke it, that kill its fruitfulness. Instead, in the pure, you might say, undistracted heart, all the nutrients are directed toward the growth of fruit. All the energies, all the limited energies that we have as human beings are not directed to that which is passing, temporal, even you might say frivolous. All the energies aren't devoted to the cares of life, the riches of life, and the pleasures of life. Energies, instead, are devoted to the growth of fruit.

And not just some fruit but looking back to verse 8, we can see that this soil is abundantly fruitful. There's an incredible bounty that Jesus describes here in this hundredfold harvest,

which is beyond the wildest imagination of any farmer who sows his field. A hundredfold harvest. Time to retire, right? Massive harvest of fruit because the fruit bearing just doesn't stop. And again, the tense of the verb here, *karpophoreo* is a present tense verb. It's a continuous action of bearing fruit. It's always happening, it's always ongoing in the life of this kind of soil. This is the tree, Psalm 1:3, right, that is "planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season," and you might say season after season bears fruit. "Its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers."

Pure soil, the good heart is characterized by repeatedly, continuously, over a lifetime, bearing fruit, and a lot of it. Purity of heart means that there is a regular attentiveness to weeding the garden of the heart, to uproot any sign of a noxious, troublesome little plant, a little weed in the heart. And it's gonna distract, and choke out the life of the heart. And Jesus listed the kind of weeds that we need to watch out for and root out in verse 14, "The cares, and the riches and the pleasures of life." Those temporal distractions we talked about last week. You can listen to that sermon online, but they're weeds that will choke out the seed, and they will prevent

fruitfulness. But a pure heart is gonna give attention to purity, to keep on weeding that soil, getting rid of anything that will distract and take away life-giving energy.

So the good soil heart is soft, and it's deep, and it's pure, and we can understand here why it would be fruitful. That is loamy soil in the heart, perfect for growing abundant fruit. But why does Jesus call this heart, in verse 15, "An honest and good heart?" We all know Jeremiah 17:9 says that "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick." So how can Jesus here say that this heart is honest and good? There are two words translated as honest and good. They are *kalos* and *agathos*. First word, *kalos*, it refers to that which meets a very high standard of quality. In fact, in verse 15, the soil or the earth is described with this word, as meeting a high standard of quality, that rich, loamy soil. This is that soft, deep, weed-free, loamy soil that's rich in nutrients, great access to water, air, all the rest.

Verse 15, likewise, the receptive heart is described as good and, in this case, referring to a moral quality. Moral



quality, so it meets a high standard of moral quality set by whom? By God. It is good or noble, praiseworthy, that's another way to translate it. What makes this heart good, and noble, and praiseworthy is the fact that it does what is good, and noble, and praiseworthy. Namely, it is a heart that listens to and heeds, holds fast to the Word of God. It's a heart that's interested in understanding the Word of God and really getting it. Really going deep, holding fast to it, that's what makes it good, and noble, and praiseworthy.

And understand this, there is a moral component to what you're doing right now, listening to the Word of God. You're either a moral listener, being very receptive to God's word, or you are an immoral listener, one that is drifting off to sleep. One that's checking the watch, wondering about dinner reservations, or what's in the oven, or what's next today. That's an immoral way to listen to God's Word. And I know none of you are like that today, so we're gonna keep on moving.

The second word here, is *agathos*. *Agathos*, also, just like *kalos*, refers to conforming to a high standard of quality. But

this, referring to a high standard of quality, is that which makes this useful or beneficial, like bearing fruit. Back in verse 8, the earth there is described as good, and it uses this word *agathos* to emphasize its usefulness. How beneficial the land is that produces a hundredfold crop. That is good, beneficial land. So in the same way, what makes this heart good, useful, and beneficial in God's eyes is that it bears fruit, and it bears much fruit, and it bears fruit with endurance. This is the kind of heart that is robust, persevering, able to produce. That is a good heart, beneficial, useful to our Lord.

Matthew and Mark also record this parable of the soils, and it's notable that the Gospels do record the parable of the soils and have it at the very entrance into the parables. This is the gateway through which we are to enter into Jesus' teaching through parables, because it is so important. That's why we've taken four weeks, or whatever it's been, ongoing through this. It's so important. In Matthew, Jesus says that the good heart is one that "hears and understands the Word." In Mark, the good heart, heart "hears and accepts the Word." So there's understanding and then there is acceptance.

In Luke we see the hearing, and understanding, and receiving are joined together here as "holding the word fast and then bearing fruit with patience," or endurance, perseverance. So in Luke's account, our attention is drawn to the elements of faith and obedience. Biblical faith, faith described in Scripture, true saving faith is that which has an intellectual, and an emotional, and a volitional component. Intellectually, you must understand what is taught. Emotionally or affectionately, you must embrace what is taught. But it must also drive action. That's the volitional component. It must change your life, and that is what Luke summarizes here. Faith and obedience.

The good hearted here, after hearing the Word, he believes the Word, that is, he understands it, he embraces it and accepts it, and he also holds it fast. And then it says he obeys the word; that is, he bears fruit. Hearing and obeying, biblically speaking, one and the same. True biblical hearing means to be obedient with what you hear. That is the first and most fundamentally moral quality that makes a heart good, and noble, and praiseworthy.

But there's also that utilitarian component, that quality that makes this heart good, and useful, and beneficial, because it does what the Master wants it to do. It's beneficial to his purposes. The soft hearted, deep hearted, pure hearted are those with hearts that are both *kalos* and *agathos*. They are noble and they are useful. They are praiseworthy and they're beneficial.

Now are there such people? Again, didn't Jesus describe the heart in Matthew 15:18 as that which "defiles the person"? Namely, "evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander." Is Jesus talking about, here in verse 15, that there are those who receive the Word with an honest and good heart, a noble, praiseworthy heart, and one that's useful and beneficial? What is he talking about here? So get ready to do just a little theology this morning, okay? It's vital that we clarify this.

In Jesus' day, the word heart, the word is *kardia*. The word heart didn't refer to the seat of emotions or, or feelings like, like you might find in a Hallmark greeting card. They didn't think of the heart primarily in an anatomical way either, like a

large muscle in the chest that pumps, uh, blood through the body. They had words and concepts for the heart muscle and the feelings. But the *kardia*, the word heart, represented something else in their minds. The heart in both Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament) culture referred to the mind. It referred to the thought life.

So, biblically speaking, the heart is your mind. It's your thinking. It's your Mission Control center. It's where you think, and understand, and process, and, and embrace, and then do, and plan. It's your Mission Control center. It's the place where understanding and comprehension occurs. It's the place where affections originate and thrive, and it's the place where thoughts, and intentions, and decisions of your will take place. It's the driving center of your entire life, the heart.

So, the heart or the mind, let's make this clear, the heart is not the brain. The mind is not the brain. Brain is material. It's made up of cells. It's matter, grey matter, we call it, right? The heart, the mind in the Bible speaks of and this is what Jesus is talking about, that Mission Control center of your

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life, performing all your thinking, willing, understanding. The mind, will, the affections, the heart or the mind, that is not a material reality. It is an immaterial reality. So probably the closest synonym to the heart is the mind or the spirit. Those are roughly synonymous concepts.

So, coming back to Matthew 15:18, where Jesus says, "What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles the person." What Jesus means is that, before sins like actual murder, and adultery, and sexual immorality, and theft, before all that becomes manifest externally, like in breaking a law, in doing something immoral that be can be seen, that you can take a picture of, before all that happens, all those thoughts and ideas are first hatched in the heart, in the mind, in the thinking. And that's why he began that list with "evil thoughts."

"What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and that's what defiles a person." So bad heart will obviously produce bad thoughts. Bad thoughts then lead to bad intentions, bad plans, bad willing, and that leads to bad behavior. But a

good heart, a good heart is going to produce good thoughts. And good thoughts leading to good intentions, good plans, good willing, and that leads to good behavior. And that's exactly what Jesus taught. We've covered that in the Sermon on the Mount. Luke 6:45 says, "the good person, out of the good treasure of his heart, produces good. Evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."

We often say, well I don't know what's in his heart. You know he, I know he lives like the devil all during the week, does his own thing. I don't know what's in his heart. He's probably a Christian. Yeah, he said he's a Christian, so he's probably a Christian. Jesus said, look what comes out of the heart, through what comes out of the mouth, through what he does, through how he lives, through his priorities, through his behavior. You want to know what a life, what life is in the heart? Look at what life is produced on the outside.

Not only are we able to see what's in the heart, we're commanded to. We're commanded to look at this. Why? Because we

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need to know, by looking at a life, whether this person is in need of evangelism or discipleship. We're called to love God and love one another, and if we love others, we want to discern, is this person a Christian or a non-Christian? It's a most fundamental question. Any time we get into a relationship with somebody, we don't know, is this person saved or not? Why? Because we care for them. Because we want to see them join us in Heaven at the throne, worshiping Christ. We don't want to see them die. So we need to know Christian, non-Christian?

How do we know? How do we know the heart? What's produced out of the life? What's flowing out of the mouth? What's in the conversation? Is it superficial chit chat all the time, and having to do with the cares, and the riches, and the pleasures of life? Pretty good indication of what's in the heart.

All of us are fallen. Born into this world as evil and wicked, as the Bible says, we are "dead in our trespasses and sins," Ephesians 2:1. And because of that, we are by nature children of wrath, Ephesians 2:3. And that means what Jeremiah says, in that context about the heart, is true of us when we're



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born into this world. Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick. Who can know it?"

If you're having trouble believing that about the fundamental nature of humanity, you need to check out the news headlines. Peruse the daily news and you're gonna find that, that God's Word really does have the measure of the human heart. It's beyond controversy that the heart of mankind is exactly as the Bible describes it, "desperately sick." And out of that heart proceeds all kinds of degrading and devastating sins. It's no surprise, then, that sinners are in need, desperate need of salvation. Since we're born into this world as children of wrath, and since we prove our parentage all along the way by our wicked thoughts, and words, and deeds, since we're manifesting the true condition of our hearts, all of our hearts come into this world as bad soil.

So then, how is it that anyone can exchange their bad heart for a good heart? How does someone make bad soil good? Truth is, nobody can. You can't do it, I can't do it, not on our own. As God said through Jeremiah, Jeremiah 13:23, "Can the Ethiopian

change his skin or the leopard his spots? Well then, also, you can do good who are accustomed to doing evil." Yet we find Jesus speaking of those who are characterized by "hearing the Word, holding fast to, in an honest and good heart, bearing fruit with endurance." Look, that gives us hope. It points us to the biblical doctrine, essential doctrine of regeneration. New birth.

Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again." Nicodemus, an older man, probably 60, 70 years old. He was, as Jesus called him there, "the teacher of Israel." The Teacher of Israel, familiar with all the texts of the Old Testament, the Law and the prophets. And as Jesus talked to Nicodemus about this new birth, "you must be born again," he referred back to Ezekiel 36:25-27. Jot that down in your notes, because that states the doctrine of regeneration, the doctrine of the new birth very, very clearly. God says there, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart."

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There it is. "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh," kind of like a farmer going through his soil, removing all the rocks, getting out all that doesn't actually stimulate growth, he's taking it all out, "I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." What's a heart of flesh? It's not a carnal heart. It's not a fleshly, worldly heart. "I will give you a heart of flesh" means one that pumps, one that works, one that is living, one that is responsive to stimuli. "I'll put my Spirit within you," he says, "and I will cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." You know what that sounds like? That sounds like a soft, and a deep, and a pure heart.

Let me state this as plainly and as clearly as I can, for the soil to receive the seed which grows into a fruit bearing plant, the soil must first be good soil. Otherwise, no growth. It has to first be good soil. In the same way, for the heart to receive the Word of God, which then grows into a fruit bearing person, the heart must first be a good heart. And the only way to make an evil heart into a good heart is what Jesus says to Nicodemus, "You must be born again."

What makes good soil good? Spiritual regeneration. The life-giving, creative power of the Holy Spirit. "You must be born again," and once that sovereign work of God takes place in the heart, all the other dominoes fall. That is such good news. We don't have to gut out fruit producing on our own strength or power. We don't have it. God does the work. He does the work. He won't obey for us, he won't believe for us, but he will empower our believing and our obey, obeying and fruit bearing. The new birth means a new creation, and the new creation is fitted with a new heart that is able to be soft, and deep, and pure. And that soft hearted, deep hearted, pure hearted person is possessed of a heart that Jesus describes here as *kalos* and *agathos*; noble, useful, praiseworthy, and beneficial.

That's why Jesus said in Matthew 12:33, "You've got to make the tree good, if you want to get good fruit." Spiritual regeneration is the prerequisite to spiritual fruitfulness. Without spiritual regeneration, there will be no fruit. There may be counterfeit fruit, things that look fruitful. But no true spiritual fruit.

So if you're characterized by hearing the Word of God, holding it fast with an honest and good heart, bearing fruit with endurance, persevering to the end in spite of testing, producing fruit, like tribulation, persecution because of the Word, you're still producing fruit, then take heart. That's proof positive that the seed of God's word has found a home in the good soil of your good heart, which means you have been born again. What good news.

But if you're characterized by hearing the Word of God and responding like those other three soils, religious rejection or indifference on the one hand; immediate joy, but then falling away under pressure and testing on the other hand; or continuous distraction by the cares, riches and pleasures of life; then you need to examine yourself and see whether you be in the faith.

Again, I've been quoting from J.C. Ryle. He's been, he's had such practical, helpful commentary on this parable. He says, quote, "The last caution in the parable of the Sower is to be, Sower is to beware of being content with any religion that does

not bear fruit. Our Lord tells us that the hearts of those who hear the Word aright are like good soil. The seed of the gospel sinks down deeply into their wills and produces practical results in their faith and practice. They not only hear with pleasure, but act with decision. They repent, they believe, they obey. We must always bear in mind that this is the only religion that saves souls. Outward profession of Christianity, and the formal use of church ordinances and sacraments never gave anyone hope in life, or peace in death, or rest in the world beyond the grave. There must be fruit of the Spirit in our hearts and our lives, or else the gospel is preached to us in vain. Only those who bear such fruit will be found at Christ's right hand on the day when he appears." End Quote.

By answering that first question this morning, "What makes the good soil good or fruitful?" We've been able to understand the interpretation of verse 15. But let's turn our attention now to the implications of verse 15. Which brings us to a second question. What makes good soil needful? What makes it needful? Good soil is needed to bear fruit. Bad soil: hard-packed, impenetrable, rocky and shallow, thorny, distracted by temporal

cares, riches, pleasures, bad soil is a picture of an unregenerate heart, one that produces no fruit.

Fruitfulness is eternal life. Fruitlessness is not life. It's not life, it's evidence of sickness and death. No life. No fruit, no life, and that means judgment is looming. An eternity of suffering the wrath of God. Judgment is looming for the fruitless life. So possessing good soil is the issue. Possessing good soil in the heart means avoiding divine judgment on the one hand, and receiving divine blessing on the other. So good soil is needful. It's absolutely essential for producing fruit. Fruitfulness is what God is looking for.

Now I'm just looking at the time, and instead of taking you to Isaiah 5, I tried to do it last week, I couldn't do it because of time, and I wanted to do it this week, but I can't get to it because of time, so will you all promise me, through a nod of the head, that you will read Isaiah 5? Go back to Isaiah 5 and just jot it down your notes. Because God wrote that metaphor of the vineyard. He is the divine planter. He plants a vineyard. It's a picture of his people. He says, "It's the

vineyard of the Lord of Hosts. It's the House of Israel, the men of Judah are his pleasant planting." And it's a picture of God's people.

And he promises that vineyard destruction. Why does he promise destruction? Because it is fruitless. He did everything necessary. He dug, he plowed the soil, made sure it's rich and loamy. He put a wall around it, a tower in the middle of it, and make sure nobody's stealing, nobody's sowing thorns in it. He takes care of that vineyard. And what does it produce? No fruit. So what does God say? "What should I do with my vineyard?" In fact, the vineyard produced bad fruit; Thorn bushes, all kinds of cares, of love of wealth, and riches, and property, and homes.

It produced, actually, vile things like, like unrighteousness, and robbing the poor, taking advantage of the widow and the orphan. Bad fruit, selfish desires and so God says, I'm gonna judge it. I'm gonna wipe out Israel. I'm gonna wipe out Judah. He is so, actually you can see it coming through, he's so angry about bad religion, fruitless religion.



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Why is he angry? Because false religion in Israel, a fruitless religion practiced by Israel, it's a blasphemy against the true and living God.

And let's not leave that in the past. Let's update it. God is even more angry with our own generations about our, our sub-Christian forms of Christianity, and our multitude of fruitless Christians out there who profess the name of Christ, but bear no fruit that comes out of Scripture. He's even more angry about that. Why do I say that? Because the pinnacle of divine revelation came in his beloved Son, and you know what? He expects more.

"Long ago," Hebrews 1:1-3, "at many times, in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." Why is that important? Because oh, because the Son is heir of all things, he's the Creator of the world, he is the radiance of God's glory, he's the exact imprint of his nature. He upholds the universe by the word of his power," and after he came in the form of a baby, was born through the Virgin's womb, he grew up and lived as a man, and

then he went to the Cross. And it says, "After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."

You know what he's doing there? He's not resting, he's working, he's praying, he's interceding for the saints according to the will of God. To fail to bow down to him, to fail to find joy and rejoice in that King; "*Oh worship the King*" is how we started out this morning, right? To fail to serve him and obey him wholeheartedly and cheerfully, and not bearing any biblically defined fruit, not living for his glory, and all the while claiming to be saved by his grace, claiming to be washed by his blood, and yet unwilling to really live for him.

To people like that, the writer of the Hebrews gives a warning. "Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?" Stern warning, but a right warning of many

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today who profess to be Christians. What Paul told Titus is true of them. Titus 1:6, "They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works."

It's a very serious thing to profess to know God and deny him by not bearing fruit, by distorting the truth. It creates sub-Christian forms that do not bear fruit. By professing the truth, but refusing to submit to Christ and obey his lordship, that does not bear fruit. All this false Christianity in our day, like the religion in Israel's day, is a very serious sin before God. In fact, I would tell you that it is more sinful to be religious and produce no fruit, than to be utterly worldly. Not be taking up a seat in pews in churches. Very serious sin. That kind of false Christianity lies about the power of God in the Gospel, because it professes this vital connection to God's transforming power, but it doesn't possess that connection.

I mean, look at a life that says, I know God, but then lives however it wants to. You see no transformative power in that life. That tells a lie about God. That tells a lie about God's power. True power is found in the transformation of a life

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from what it was to Christlikeness. That's something that cannot be done by any power on Earth. And I know many stories in this room. I know many stories of other churches I've been a part of, where it is absolutely astounding to see the transforming power of God in the Gospel.

Again, in Hebrews, "The land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it produces a crop useful for those whose sake it's cultivated," that kind of land "receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it's worthless, near to being cursed, and its end to be burned." Passage ends with a warning, which we've heard clearly: good soil is needed, needed for producing fruit, which avoids judgment, wrath. That provides a first answer to the question; what makes good soil needful?

What about the blessing, though? What about the blessing? This takes us into very pleasant territory. What makes good soil needful? Good soil's needful for producing fruit which brings the blessing of God. Good soil is a picture of a regenerate heart, one that produces fruit, and lots of it. Just as we plant seeds in soil to get a harvest, so we can eat and give thanks to

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God, so also we share the Word of God with others that they might be converted, that they might repent and believe the Gospel, so we can watch them grow and give glory to God.

Good soil, it's the seedbed for the fruit of the Spirit, which is walking and living in increasing degrees of love, and joy, and peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. That kind of fruit brings joy, that kind of fruit brings contentment, that kind of fruit brings satisfaction in God, no matter what the circumstances. As we learn from the parable of the soils, the Spirit produces this incredible yield of fruit, "a thirtyfold, sixtyfold, hundredfold yield." Where there's fruit, there's life and where there is life, there's joy, and there's glorifying God.

We ended last time with what Jesus told his disciples in John 15, that's where Josh started this morning. And Jesus says this, he tells his disciples, "If you abide in me, my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, it'll be done for you." How can he say that and not be worried that you're gonna ask for a Ferrari? Because if you ask, if his words abide in you, you

don't care about Ferraris. What you care about is your own sanctification, is holiness. And you care about the holiness of other people.

And so he says, ask if you're, "If my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish." His words are guiding your prayers. God, sanctify me. God be merciful to me in the sin that I'm really struggling with. Help me to grow in holiness. Help me to repent of sin. Help me to walk in righteousness. Oh no, by the way, my brother and my sister, they're struggling too. Will you give us grace that we might be sanctified and bring glory to you? You know how eager he is to answer that prayer, yes? It'll be done for you, he says.

"By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I've loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." See the connection between obedience and love? We obey him because we love him. "These

things I've spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be made full," or complete.

Fruitfulness proves our vital connection to the vine. Our relationship to the vinedresser. Fruitfulness means obedience to Christ's commands. Fruitfulness means we are abiding in the love of God and of the Son. Fruitfulness means fullness of joy as we share in that Trinitarian, the love, love that the Father has for the Son, the Son has for the Father, the Spirit has for the Father and the Son, and the living God, by the way, has for us. That's two reasons why good soil is needful, to avoid di, divine judgment on the one hand, but to receive divine blessing on the other hand.

Let's ask a final question this morning. Number three: What keeps good soil fruitful? What keeps it fruitful? The answer is regular self-examination, confession of sin, an unswerving commitment to mortify sin, and an aggressive pursuit of holiness through a life of repentance. If you do that, you're gonna keep your good soil, good, fruitful. You're gonna cultivate a good heart. And before you charge me with preaching legalism, as if I

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were preaching salvation by works, remember that I've just taught about the need for spiritual regeneration unto saving faith, which is salvation by grace through faith. No, our works do not save us, but Christ's works do. God's works save us.

God initiating everything in us saves us. It's not our initiative that, for God, that counts for anything, because we, on our own, are dead in our trespasses and sins. There's no initiative from a corpse. I've seen a lot of 'em. They don't do anything. What's required is new life. God's initiative brings about new birth. God's initiative changes us. It gives us spiritual eyes to see the truth. It gives us spiritual ears to hear the Word. It gives us a new heart to "hold it fast in an honest and good heart and bear fruit with endurance." That's why Jesus called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." And then he said to his disciples, "To you it has been given." Why? Because they had ears to hear.

We had some Bible verses to back up the point. Paul commanded us in Philippians 2:12-13, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it's God who works in you



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to both, to will and to do for his good pleasure." Peter said something similar. 2 Peter 1:10-11, "Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election. For if you practice these qualities," What qualities? If you see 2 Peter 1 verses 5-7, "faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love", "if you practice these qualities, you will never fall, but an entrance into the Eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you."

Those just expand the echoes of what Jesus had already taught. Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven." Or in John 15a, Jesus said, "By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples." Fruit bearing, then, that's the essential thing. Bearing fruit, not just for a moment, not something that you can point to in the past, but bearing fruit over a lifetime. That is the essential thing. That's the patience, the with endurance, the perseverance, that phrase that ends in Luke 8:15. That is the true mark of genuine discipleship.

So what keeps good soil good and fruitful? How do we make sure we keep on bearing fruit, that we are all more diligent to confirm our calling and election? Let's start with watchfulness and self-examination, and then we'll talk about, quickly, just how to cultivate the soil of your heart. And I want to encourage you this morning not to make this only a personal thing. This is my personal relationship with God. I just, me, myself, and I, take counsel between us, our own, my own personal Trinity. No, open yourself up to your brothers and sisters in Christ. Since we're sometimes, able, unable to see ourselves for how we really are, it is wise to ask others what they see in our lives, isn't it? In your desire to self-examine, humble yourself and be transparent, and let somebody else, a brother or sister, look into your life, and consider what they have to say.

What are we to watch for? What do we examine? First, if you wanna watch for and guard against the hard-packed pathway soil heart, keep plowing the ground, okay, so that it's, that soil stays soft. And let me tell you, this doesn't mean just listen to more sermons. Examine yourself to make sure you're practicing the truth from the sermons that you're already hearing week

after week. In fact, don't just keep adding more, until you know you're actually obeying what you've heard.

Do you understand the Word of God, what it means by what it says? Do you accept the confrontations and also receive the comforts of the text? Or do re, you refuse to be comforted by the text? Do you refuse to, to receive confrontations that come from Scripture? Do you always apply these things to somebody else who needs it? That guy who really needs it over there. That husband of mine, or that wife of mine. Do you really, you know what to do with the truths you read and hear in sermons? You know what to do with it, how to practically apply it? Or does the word bounce off your cold and proud heart?

Do you know how to practice the Word of God for yourself? Because that's what Jesus means, beloved, in verse 15, when he speaks about "clinging to the word and holding fast to it." "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart," Hebrews 3:12, "leading you to fall away from the living God." That is, apostatize. So plow the soil of your

heart with regular, meditative, repentive, reflection on Scripture, and cultivate a soft and responsive heart.

Second, if you want to watch for and guard against a rocky soil heart, examine yourself to see if you are enduring and persevering in the Word. So, I know it's hard, but turn off your cell phone, and your computer, and your social media accounts, and anything else that has a screen, like a television or anything else that's pumping stuff into your mind. Turn it all off. Anything that distracts you from deep reading of the Word of God. Read Scripture slowly, not quickly. Read it reflectively, meditatively, deeply, not superficially.

And be sure that any emotional responses that come out of you find their source in the Bible's deep theology. Find their source in the text. Make sure your affections are consistent with deep biblical conviction. Because it's only when you go deep that you anchor your faith deeply in biblical truth, building your life upon a rock. When your roots grow deep, then the grace of God will help you weather any storm, stand firm in any trial, pass any test, you will not wither like a shallowly

rooted plant. So as you read, pray over what you read. Ask God to show you anything in your life, your thoughts, your attitudes, your speech, your tone of voice, your priorities, your plans, behaviors, anything that does not align with the revealed Word of God.

Paul said that to the Ephesians. He said, "Look carefully, then, how you walk." Don't just look how you walk. Look carefully at it. Involve others in helping you look carefully at how you are walking, how you're living your life. And don't live "as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of the time because the days are evil. So therefore, don't be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

You say, I can't understand the will of the Lord. It's all hidden from me. Oh no it's not. There is a revealed Word of God that you're responsible to understand, as it says here. "Look carefully how you walk," and see if it measures up to the standard of what's revealed. Are the influences in your life, what you take into your mind, are they promoting that kind of mindset? Or do you prefer to live superficially, making a lot of

jokes about life instead of living godly, sober-minded, mature, Christian, dignified lives?

Third thing: If you wanna watch out for and guard against a thorny soil heart, examine yourself to see whether you are bearing fruit. And I mean true biblical fruit, not just to say, Well, I'm really nice to people. Show me in Scripture where God commands you, Thou shalt be nice. Kindness, gentleness, patience, some of the opposite virtues of the sin of anger, yes. But not just being a nice guy, a nice gal, someone who never ruffles feathers, never rocks the boat. That actually, in certain contexts, can be total sin. Examine yourself to see whether you're bearing biblical fruit. That means you're gonna have to get down in the dirt and dig. Get some dirt underneath your fingernails. Do some spade work. Do a little gardening. And when I see gardening, I mean pulling weeds out of your life.

Walk slowly through the soil of your heart. And this right here is especially a good time to ask a mature Christian friend to help you look at your life, to see what you don't see clearly. Walk through the soil of your heart and pull the weeds.

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Find any evidence that you're distracted by temporal things, the cares of life. Are you worried about making a living all the time? Is that occupying all your time and attention? What about the riches of life? Do you like the praise of others? Riches of the praise of others? Do you like stuff? Do you like opportunity? Do you like vacations? Do you like what ambition brings? Are you distracted by that?

Are you distracted by the pleasures of life? Certainly don't have to be rich in our day in order to enjoy and be totally distracted by the pleasures of life. Go through your garden and take the time. Do whatever it takes to pull those weeds. Poison those roots and grow the good fruit of the Spirit of God. As Paul said, "I say, walk by the Spirit, you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

John said, 1 John 5:21, last word in that epistle, "Little children, keep yourself from idols," like the cares of life, the riches of life, the pleasures of life. Make sure you're not cultivating thorns in the soil of your heart, like a cute little idol that you want to hold onto and protect. Like Rachel,

remember she hid her household idols underneath her saddle and she sat on them, because she wanted to hold on to 'em and keep 'em. Beloved, don't sit on the thorns. They hurt. They're not only gonna prick your sensitive flesh, but they're gonna suffocate the fruit that you wanna produce.

That's how we plow the soil of our hearts. That's how we cultivate the soil of our hearts, to make sure that that soil stays rich and loamy, that it's soft and deep and pure, that we may bear much fruit. One commentator noted, after profound reflection on the parable of the soils, he says, "Let us leave the parable with a deep sense of the danger and responsibility of all hearers of the Gospel." It's very healthy sentiment there. We should have a sense of gravity, of what we've heard, especially since three out of the four hearers of truth will not enter into Heaven. These are church people. These are people that may be in our midst, may be sitting next to you right now.

In fact, as this parable teaches, most church people are going to hell. Just as God said of Israel, "With most of them he was not well pleased, but their bodies fell in the wilderness."



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Most church people are going to Hell. Does that concern you? It concerns me. Take a good look at the man or the woman sitting next to you, and think about how well you really know that person. I mean, do you really know him? Do you know her? You know her, really. None of us knows what tomorrow may bring, so we've gotta know one another. And as the person sits next to you, he or she is looking at you as well, and asking the same thing about your spiritual condition. So prepare yourself for humble self-examination, because this is a test you do not want to get wrong.

Should be thinking thoughts like this to yourself, Boy, I know I've been sitting in church for years. But am I truly in the Faith? Claim to know whom I believed, I profess Christ as my Savior and Lord. But boy, what evidence really does point to my genuine salvation? What fruit is the Spirit producing in my life? Am I different in Christlikeness than I was a year ago?"

If others ah, come to you asking questions, getting personal, getting in your business, don't be like a typical Coloradan and say, Look, I moved out here for space, and that

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doesn't mean just geography. It means personally, too. I don't want you around me. I don't wanna ask you, you asking any questions. Don't be like that. Bring people close. Let them ask questions. Let them get personal, because that's a good sign. That's God's grace, sending you people that care. They love you. And if you love them, you'll ask them the same kinds of questions. These are the conversations you're gonna pursue.

We are Christians. We do not trade in trivial conversation. We talk about spiritual stuff. We talk about sound theology. We talk about edifying doctrine. Why? Because it's our joy. That's our birthright, the need to live out the faith we profess. That's our joy. Nothing is more natural to a Christian, or more necessary for a Christian, than to minister to one another, "provoking one another to love and good works," cultivating soft and deep and pure hearts. And by God's grace, that's what we're gonna do together. Bow with me. Let's ask God to send his Spirit and help us to cultivate soft hearts, look down deep in our hearts, and cleanse our hearts of all impurity.

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Father, we pray with David, "Search me O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. See if there be any grievous way in me." And in another place, said, "Create in me a clean heart, oh God, and renew a right spirit within me, and lead me in the way of everlasting." Father, we want to bear fruit. We want to bear much fruit that comes from that vital connection to Jesus Christ, as we abide in him. We want our fruit to be distinctively, spiritually, biblically defined fruit, wrought by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We want our fruit to bring all glory and honor and praise to you, Father. By your grace, we have followed Jesus' Word, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life would lose it. Whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." So what you command us, oh Father, please give us the power to do, by your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.