

When Jesus teaches with parables, with stories, He's inviting His listeners to find their places in the stories. Today He's using an example of a farmer at planting time, who's sowing seeds everywhere, confident that something's going to take root and produce an outstanding harvest. Jesus wants us to identify what kind of soil we think we're growing in.

The sower represents God, and the seeds are us human beings who have heard the Word of God. How will we turn out? Will we grow, or won't we? What kind of soil do we find ourselves in? What environment do we live in? What other things have we planted in our soil? Jesus points out three obstacles to our growth that can prevent us from meeting God face-to-face: shallow living, how we cope with tragedies, and how we handle the distractions of this passing world.

The seed that falls on the path and gets eaten by the birds represents people who have received God's invitation to eternal life, but they're shallow. They hear the Gospel and their response is "I don't believe it" or "So what? It's irrelevant to me" or "I have other things to do. I'm too busy; put it on the backburner for now."

These people hear the Gospel at a superficial level, and then Satan takes them away. Our culture is this path. It makes it difficult for God's Word to get through. We live in a culture today that can be shallow, superficial – even base.

People in rocky soil get easily discouraged when following Christ gets difficult, and they don't persevere. They think when tragedy strikes in their life, there mustn't be a God, and they walk away. They don't give God's love a chance to work tremendous good out of their tragedy.

The thorny soil is a bad environment that chokes out the Word in our lives, where we become more concerned with the passing things of this world, getting so wrapped up in it that we forget about God's Kingdom; when we allow the world around us to sap our energy and faith, taking away the nutrients from our soul.

Things like being preoccupied with making money, or a willingness to make it even when it's against Christ's values; or wanting authority over people so we can throw our weight around; or seeking inordinate amounts of selfish pleasure, without concern for someone else. In thorny soil, we need to consider whether there are certain places we should no longer go, or certain people we should no longer see, or certain things we should no longer do.

Some humans will thrive in good soil. They are the ones who say "Yes, God, I love you and I will be your friend. I will spend time with you and share my life with you in prayer, I'll partner with you and come to know you better, and I will help you." The Word of God has made its way into those souls, it has taken root.

Today's parable teaches that God respects our freedom, our choices. He gives us His Word to live by, but leaves it up to us how we'll grow. Jesus is encouraging us to keep our attention fixed on the goal of our life: making it to harvest, to eternal life.

As we go through the stages of life—childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, mid-life, the Golden Years -- we have many opportunities to grow deeper roots in Jesus Christ, roots of real life change, that firmly ground us through the highs and lows of this life. Let Jesus bring God's goodness out of us. Then, like really good plants do, we can become a source of nourishment for others. God loves to see that.

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