

Parables:

The Parable of the Sower

By Mary Kane

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Science Fair. Our school was going to have another Science Fair. Those two words struck fear in my heart... because in the “original language” *Science Fair* means *Parent Project*. Months of work...the data notebook...project board... research paper, complete with resources, note cards and footnotes. That particular year both of my sons had to partake in the Science Fair—*double Parent Project*! The winner of the science fair received a prize and the dubious distinction of entering the winning project in a regional science fair (which meant another six weeks of *Parent Project* work).

My oldest son, Erik, decided to do his project on plant growth. We went to the store, bought 4 identical plants and set the parameters; one plant would be watered with pop, one with orange juice, one with milk and one with water. We *hypothesized* that the one watered with pop would experience the greatest growth due to the sugar content of the pop. In order to chart the growth of the plants, we decided to measure them on a daily basis.

During the first few days of the project, my son took his measurements with interest and enthusiasm. It was exciting to see how the plants progressed. Soon, however, the plants that were watered with orange juice and milk became smelly and moldy. Erik’s enthusiasm dwindled to neutrality as he brought the tray of messy plants upstairs for their daily measurement. Eventually, he developed an overall loathing for the project. These ill feelings were brought to a head one day when, during the daily measurement procedure, Erik tripped on the top step and sent all the plants crashing to the kitchen floor. (Fortunately, we were able to salvage the plants.)

During the last ten days of the project, Erik developed a terrible case of the flu. He was unable to finish his project, but had to turn in what he had been able to complete. I was ok with the status of his project because I figured there would be no possible way he would win the Science Fair, thus extending my *Parent Project* work. (To my horror he actually made it to the final round, but thankfully was awarded third place!).

Overall, we were surprised with the results of Erik's plant project. The plant that was given good old H₂O experienced the greatest growth. The plant given the milk fared the worst. This science fair project confirmed what we already knew; conditions matter greatly where plant growth is concerned. Conditions also matter greatly where our hearts are concerned! In order for God's Word to grow in our hearts, the conditions must be just right.

Please pray for God to fill you afresh with His Holy Spirit and to open the eyes of your heart that you may learn from His Holy Word.

Please read Matthew 13:1-23.

In this parable, what does the *seed* represent (verse 19)?

The seed is the Word of God.

Think about *seeds* for a moment and then write down everything you think of when you hear the word *seed*.

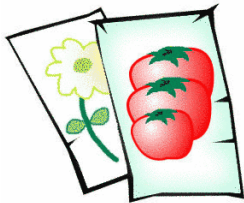
Seeds need to be planted in something. They grow other plants just like the ones they came from. People eat seeds; they provide food and nourishment. Seeds can be planted by people. They need certain conditions in which to grow.

Please consider these following definitions for the word *seed*; "...the grain or kernel which contains within itself the germ of the future plants... a few survivors reserved as the germ of the next generation just

as seed is kept from the harvest for the sowing...whatever possesses life giving force or vital power."¹

Please take the information you just read and write a statement as to how it can be compared to God's Word:

What happened to the seed in verse 4?



It fell by the wayside and birds came and devoured them. The original word used in this verse for *wayside* means a "well travelled road, a way of thinking or living, a course of conduct." I am not a farmer, but I have planted enough flowers and vegetables to know that seeds do not germinate very easily in hard packed dirt. The seeds just lay on top of the hard soil, unable to sprout, where they are an easy target for birds to gobble up.

Matthew Henry states that in ancient times, the farmers "... had pathways through their corn-fields (ch. 12:1), and the seed that fell on them never entered [the soil], and so the birds picked it up."² Living in the Midwest, the Corn Belt, I have seen huge semis, loaded with grain, spill seed on the roadsides while transporting the grain to market. Very quickly the birds of the field swoop down and gobble up the spilled grain, leaving none behind to germinate and grow.

A well travelled road would be very compact indeed, tender crops would never germinate in this environment. As a matter of fact, the only plants

¹ Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *sperma* (Strong's 4690)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2010. 28 Jun 2010. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=G4690&t=KJV> >

² Henry, Matthew. "Commentary on Matthew 13." . Blue Letter Bible. 1 Mar 1996. 2010. 28 Jun 2010. < http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/comm_view.cfm?AuthorID=4&contentID=1608&commInfo=5&topic=Matthew&ar=Mat_13_4 >

I have seen growing in the cracks of roads were useless weeds; I've never seen a tomato plant or a cornstalk growing in the middle of a highway. It is also very hard for a seed of God's truth to germinate in the mind of someone who has already closed his mind to God's Word. Worldly wisdom and faulty teachings have worn deep hard paths in the minds of some unbelievers. When the truth of God's Word is scattered abroad, it lays exposed on these hardened minds for the enemy to snatch away.

Do you see any hardened pathways in your thinking? We can usually spot them if we catch ourselves saying "God's Word says... but *I* think..."

What do you need to do to replace this faulty thinking?

Now let's consider verse 5.

Where did the seed fall in this verse?

What happened to it and why?

In the front of my house I have a hosta garden. After I planted my hostas, my husband lined the area with plastic and then covered it with landscaping rock. I like to weed in my hosta garden because the weeds are easily removed from the rocks; the roots are very shallow. There is

very little earth or dirt for the roots to hang onto. There is also very little root to hang on to the dirt!

Verses 6 and 21 state that the seed withered away because it had “no root.” When we dig into the original language we are able to gain a little insight as to why there was no root. The original word for *root* used in this verse is *rhiza*, from which our own word *rhizome* is derived. *Rhiza* translates as a sprout, a shoot, a root. It also describes one who “has but a superficial experience of divine truth, and *has not permitted* it to make its way into the inmost recesses of the soul...of a person disposed to apostatize and induce others to commit the same offence (emphasis mine).”³ There was no root present in this plant because it was not permitted to grow. We have a choice then, when we hear the Word whether we will receive it and let it sink down into our souls and take root or reject it and let the Enemy snatch it away from us. The choice is ours.

What does the sun represent in this part of the parable (see verse 21)?

The *sun* represents tribulation and persecution that comes to us because of the Word. The original Greek word for *tribulation* used in this verse is *thlipsis* which means “pressure, pressing together, distress or straits.” Interestingly, *thlipsis* is derived from another Greek word *thlibo* which is used to describe the process of crushing grapes.

Is anyone feeling a little pressured? What’s crushing you right now?

Hold your ground and take your pressures to the Lord. Ask Him to give you the strength and courage you need to deal with these issues. Remember, He has said that we are hard pressed on every side, but not

³ Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *rhiza* (Strong's 4491)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2010. 28 Jun 2010. <
<http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G4491&t=NKJV>

crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down , but not destroyed! When we are suffering for the sake of His Word—hold on! He has a blessing waiting for us if we will only persevere!

Please read verse 7 again.

Where did the seed fall in this verse?

What did the thorns do?

What do the thorns represent according to verse 22?

The thorns represent *the cares of the world* and *the deceitfulness of riches*. *Merimna*, the original Greek word for *care*, is derived from another Greek word *merizo*. The definition of *merizo* is very interesting; it means “to divide, cut into pieces, be split into fractions.”⁴ God’s Word tells us that we must have an *undivided heart*; a heart that focuses completely on Him. If we do not guard our hearts, they may be cut into pieces from our worries and cares.

Deceitfulness means to beguile, deceive and to cheat. When we are focused on accumulating the world’s riches, they actually *cheat* us out of that which is truly valuable—the Word of God. Riches are a cheap substitute for the Word of God. One has temporary rewards—the other has eternal rewards.

What is the final outcome of focusing on cares and riches?

⁴ *The Blue Letter Bible CD*, CD-ROM, version 2.11. Sowing Circle, 2006.

We will be unfruitful. And it is to our Father's glory that we bear much fruit. If we are completely focused on the cares of this world and gathering money we will not bear the fruit of the Spirit or the fruit of good works.

Let's turn our attention back to the text.

Where did the seed fall in verse 8?

Those of us who garden know that good ground does not become good ground accidentally!

Describe what the *good ground* is like and the processes that are used in order to cultivate good ground:

In order to ensure a good crop from a garden, the ground must be prepared; farmers never throw good seed in the middle of a weed patch. First, weeds, thorns and rocks must be removed. Second, the soil must be turned over and the hard pieces broken up with a shovel. Third, the soil itself must be assessed; if the soil contains too much clay, humus and sand must be added to the soil. Finally, the soil must be maintained. Keeping the soil in good condition is a constant process; weeds and alien plants must be removed on a daily basis.

As I was writing this, God began to show me something I had never noticed before. Go back and read verses 4-8 and see if you notice a progression from verse to verse.

While I'm not trying to launch a new doctrine, please consider the following progression in the chart that I have started and try to fill in the missing blanks (there are no exact answers here):

Ground/Heart Condition	Growth	Action
(verse 4) Wayside	Seed only	Hear only
(verse 5) Stony Ground	Seed, leaves	Hear and _____
(verse 7) Thorny Ground	Seed, leaves, - _____	Hear, _____ and _____
(verse 8) Good Ground	Seed, leaves, _____, _____	Hear, _____, _____ and _____

My thoughts are filled in below.

Ground/Heart Condition	Growth	Action
(verse 4) Wayside	Seed only	Hear only
(verse 5) Stony Ground	Seed, leaves	Hear and receive
(verse 7) Thorny Ground	Seed, leaves, roots	Hear, receive and act
(verse 8) Good Ground	Seed, leaves, roots, fruit	Hear, receive, act and persevere

We see a progression then in each of these situations:

- 1) **The Wayside**, the Word was heard, but was snatched away when it was only a seed.
- 2) **The Stony Ground**, the Word (seed) was heard and received and had growth above ground, but no root so it died.

3) **Thorny Ground** the Word was heard, received and acted upon so the seed sprouted, rooted and grew, but the thorns sprang up and choked the plants.

4) **Good Ground** the land was prepared for the seed, so the Word was heard, received, acted upon with perseverance, therefore the seed sprouted, grew and produced fruit!

How do we apply all this information that God has given us for our benefit? In order to receive from God's word, we must:

1. **Prepare the Ground:** We need to remove stones, thorns and break up the hardness of our hearts. Do you have any areas of your life that you haven't given over to Christ? Is there any habitual sin or ungodly tendency that needs to be eliminated? We need to remove these items from our hearts so God's Word will have room to grow.
2. **Listen to God:** Do not give the Enemy one second of your time. When he tempts you to disbelieve God, shut him down immediately by saying out loud something such as, "'God is the way, the truth and the life.' I'm going to believe what His Word says, rather than the lies of the Enemy."
3. **Continue through trials:** Expect them to come and be prepared for them. If you have decided to trust God for a financial situation, have ready at your fingertips several verses pertaining to the provision of God. Ask other mature Christians to pray for you during your hard times. Read about Joseph, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego and Daniel; their stories never fail to inspire me!
4. **Make God your first priority.** Do not let the cares of life, your job, your to-do list or social ambitions come before seeking God. Spend time with Him first thing every day. Set a prayer time and stick to it. Turn off the Top Forty and listen to a few sound radio preachers such as Chuck Swindoll or Dr. David Jeremiah. If you seek God first, you will not need to worry about anything because He will provide all that you need.

5. List any other truths that God has revealed to you in the course of this study.

In closing, please read the following verse from Hosea 10:12:

"Sow for ourselves righteousness;

reap in mercy;

Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord,

till He comes and rains righteousness on you."

May God bless you richly as you study His Holy Word!

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