

The Sower and the Vine

Spiritual Responses to God



Sermon Text

Luke 8:4-17; John 15:1-8



Big Idea

God loves us and want to establish an abundant life in us through Him, now and for eternity. While we may respond in any one of 4 ways to the Gospel message at different times in our lives, God is consistently patient and faithful.

(1) The Path - I Hear it, but I don't really Believe it

The Gospel message – that God loves us and has sent His Son to die as a penalty for all of our sins, and He wants to live through us in a spiritually transformed life – is what many of us have heard since our childhood. This message permeates church sermons, articles, books, and songs. We have heard this through parents, friends and family members. But it's one thing to hear; it's another thing to respond beyond hearing the message. One may hear it, but may not really believe it, or act on it. Like seeds falling on an open path or on deaf ears, the message is plucked out of one's mind and never has a chance to advance beyond hearing. Jesus' explanation involves the proactive presence of evil, specifically, Satan.

(2) Rocky Ground - I Hear it, I Believe it, but I don't really Grow

Many hear the message of God and acknowledge its truth for their lives but don't take deeper, nurturing steps toward development. This belief may be real in one's heart and mind, but moves little beyond the surface with no proactive follow-up. There may even be small growth but then a withering away of one's faith as the spiritual life is not nourished or sustained. Jesus' explanation is that these joyful believers with shallow roots "fall away" when confronted with temptation, difficulty, and/or persecution.

(3) Among Thorns - I Hear it, I Believe it, Grow, but I don't really Produce Fruit

This is the category of many devout Christians, like myself for many years. We believe and move through life with a mix of faith, worldly pursuits and entanglements. The net result is immature fruit or no real fruit at all because God is relegated to lower levels of devotion. It's living the Christian life at less than 100%. While there may be manifest growth, what is missing is consistency and full-blown submission to a Spirit-led life on all fronts. Jesus explains that the impact is on inhibiting or choking off full fruit production.

(4) Good Soil – I Hear it, I Believe it, Grow, and I Produce Multiplied Fruit.

This is the true "all in" Christ-following disciple. The "old man" is dead. Not simply the go-to-church-on-Sunday-and-maybe-a-mid-week-Bible-study-meeting-Christian; this is the full-surrendering disciple abiding daily in cross-carrying, deeply rooted in rich and nourishing soil blossoming in fresh and multiplied fruit, even a hundredfold. Jesus' explanation involves hearing, understanding, patience, and a good, honest, steadfast heart. As we know and are told in John 15, Jesus is the Vine and the only source of fruit. If no abiding connection to Jesus, then no fruit bearing. Only fully devoted discipleship produces fruit.

Reflection Questions



- Take the Personal Spiritual Assessment Test. First, read through the Parable of the Sower (Soils) either in Matt. 13:1-9 or Mark 4:1-9 or Luke 8:4-8. Then review the summarized 4 Soil Types below and think about your own personal response to God. Check the one that most applies to you today:
 - Open Path – hear about God, but never really take it to heart, so quickly lose it.
 - Rocky Ground – hear about God and believe gladly, but no depth or nourishment, so nothing ever takes root.
 - Thorns and Weeds – hear about God, even experience some growth, but distracted and choked by cares and riches of the world, so ultimately unfruitful.
 - Fertile Soil – hear about God, understand it and hold it fast in an honest and good heart, ultimately yield multiplied fruit.
- Now think which of the 4 Soil Types best applies to your past Seasons of Life: Youth (< 25 years of age); Adult (<26-50 years of age); Senior (>51 years of age). Have you progressed? Regressed? God doesn't change. How have you changed?