

Daily Discipleship

Sunday, July 10-16 (A) – Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Tips of Discipleship: *Bear Fruit*

Focus Question: *How has God's Word grown in your life and produced fruit?*

word of life

"But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty." Matthew 13:23 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The Bible is a rich library containing a variety of books written by different authors to a variety of audiences at specific times in history. Poetry, letters, biography, and history are some of the literary styles interspersed among the stories of people trying to discern God's ways and will. Ultimately, the Bible is God's story.

Matthew 13 provides an example of a literary style of story called *parables*. To become more familiar with parables, read the seven parables found in Matthew 13. Often considered a simple story told by Jesus, a parable can be complex without a single clear meaning. Some consider the interpretation of a parable to be more like peeling an onion with its many layers.

The well-known parable of the seeds is the first parable found in Matthew 13. It is a realistic portrayal of the possibility of God's Word being sown, but not bearing fruit. The message of this parable must have certainly seemed true to the first followers of Jesus who already witnessed both the rejection and acceptance of God's Word spoken through Jesus.

1. *What do you believe is the main point of the parable of the seeds?*
2. *Do you find parables helpful to you? Why or why not?*

In the parable, the seed falls first on the worn path, but the seed does not penetrate the soil. No wonder the seed is easily eaten by the birds. Later, Jesus explains that this seed is like the person who hears God's Word, but the Word does not enter the heart.

Some seeds fall on rocky ground where there is not much soil, but the seeds are able to develop shallow roots. Without the depth of soil, the sprouting seed dies quickly. Jesus compares this seed to the person who hears the Word with enthusiasm and joy, but cannot withstand the heat of difficulty or persecution. This might be a good description of a new Christian.

3. *How does this parable help you understand people in their faith journey?*
4. *What does this parable have to say about a new Christian?*
5. *Why might a new Christian need to be supported?*

Other seeds fall upon thorns (like a briar patch) and are choked. Jesus compares that seed to the person who chases after the cares of the world and does not protect God's Word in his or her life. There is no good yield. The final example describes seeds sown on good soil. Finally, there is a happy ending to the story. Seeds grow and bear fruit. But, Jesus adds an extra surprise ending. The harvest is not slim pickings, but produces much bounty – even a hundredfold. Thanks be to God!

6. *Describe "good soil" for God's Word.*
7. *What might it mean for a Christian to bear a hundredfold fruit?*

word among us

Julie loved to read fictional novels. If she found a good book, she would head to the patio and stay for hours before she would move. Simply put, Julie loved a good story.

1. *What makes a good story?*
2. *What makes Jesus a good storyteller?*

The parable of the seeds is a good story which has been analyzed in depth by many scholars. It can be read from a literary perspective, but it can also be read devotionally. Take a few minutes to reflect on each section of the parable.

Imagine a worn path you have walked. Perhaps it is a path in the woods. Or maybe the path is from your childhood days as you took a shortcut to school or to your friend's house. Imagine that path on a hot day after weeks of no rain. Imagine someone leaving some seeds on the path. Watch the birds quickly come and eat those seeds. Close your eyes and imagine that scene.

3. *Describe a time when your heart felt like a well-worn path and God could not reach you.*

Now imagine a new scene. This time imagine an area with rocks and not much soil. Yet somehow there is enough soil for seeds to sprout. Imagine scorching sun killing off the small plants. Close your eyes to imagine that scene of rocks and difficulty.

4. *Describe a time when your heart felt like you did not have much depth for God's Word – perhaps when you were a young Christian.*

Now imagine thorn bushes – even a thick briar patch. Imagine seeds trying to grow underneath the thorns. You might need to imagine getting low to the ground in order to see the struggling plants. Close your eyes to imagine such a scene.

5. *Describe a time when you were caught up in the whirlwind of earthly pursuits – when God's Word got choked out.*
6. *Is there a time of life when the briar patch of earthly desires seems stronger? How so?*

One more time, imagine good, rich soil. Imagine the soil at early morning with the dew on the ground and a cool breeze blowing on your face. Imagine the touch of that soil. Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Imagine.

7. *Describe a time when you felt your heart was like good soil for God.*
8. *What does it feel like to be good soil for God's Word to be planted, grow, and produce?*

Conclude by praying Handt Hanson's song "Lord, Let My Heart Be Good Soil."

Lord, let my heart be good soil, open to the seed of your word.

Lord, let my heart be good soil, where love can grow and peace is understood.

When my heart is hard, break the stone away.

When my heart is cold, warm it with the day.

When my heart is lost, lead me on your way.

Lord, let my heart, Lord, let my heart, Lord, let my heart be good soil. Amen

Prayer

Lord, let my heart be good soil. Amen

Dig Deeper

Isaiah 55:10-13

last word

Pray each day for your heart to be good soil.



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