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### **Be Good Soil to Produce Good Life**

Luke 8:1-18

It never ceases to amaze me how God can always be trusted to lead us where we need to go, to grow us intentionally, even if we do not like the way in which we get there.

This week, the message of Jesus in Luke 8:1-18, has been driven to my very core as the Holy Spirit helped me wrestle through it and burned it into my soul.

You see, one week ago, a dear co-laborer in the ministry of the Gospel very suddenly passed from this world and into eternity with her Savior.

While she went through her final moments on this earth, she was surrounded by her family and uplifted globally in prayer.

One day later, my husband and I received word that a younger cousin of his had also suddenly left this world.

He had been found by the police at 2:30 in the morning, alone, and on the other side of the country.

Cindy's life was one that poured the light of Christ out on all whom she came into contact. Her legacy of love and of discipling will continue to be passed on generationally because she tilled the soil of her life and made space for the Word of God to grow within her.

Isaac was given the Word of God, the light of Christ, at a young age, however, in his later years, he did not lead a life which tilled good soil, in which the seed of God would grow well and become a light to others.

His passing deeply affects many, but, while I hate to even have to think about it, the question arises, "Did he leave a legacy that will point others to Christ?"

It is on this which we all must seriously reflect regarding ourselves:

Are we leading lives that reflect Christ to others?

Are we tilling the soil of our lives so that the Word of God can grow within us?

Are we being good soil that grows good life?

In Luke 8:1-18, Jesus teaches us about why we need to be good soil.

**Let's set the stage.** Come with me to a hot and dusty afternoon. The air is dry, the dirt is blowing in the wind, and we are thirsty and tired from a long day of hard work in the sun.

Suddenly, we stop and watch **as a man comes strolling into town**. He is surrounded by a group of men and women. We know right away that this is Jesus, the teacher whom we've heard so much about. And these must be His students, his disciples. We had heard that Jesus was the type of teacher who traveled with both men and women. What a scandal!

As the group comes closer, we can see that Jesus has gathered quite a large following. People have been attaching themselves to His group as He was teaching from town to town. This group is filled with people of all ages. Children. Babies. Seniors. The motley crew following Jesus stretches down the road as far as we can see.

**Tired from His long walk** and His long day telling people about God, we watch as Jesus carefully perches Himself on a boulder. Those who seem to be His closest followers, the ones who exude a comfort in His presence that can only come from living life together, sit at His feet.

Jesus waits patiently and silently as the rest of the people come into town. They gather on the grass, waiting for their teacher to speak.

Not ones to be left out of the excitement, we put down our tools and join the crowd.

Wiping His brow and raising His eyes, Jesus begins to speak:

**"A farmer went out to plant his seed**. As he scattered it across his field, some seed fell on a footpath, where it was stepped on, and the birds ate it. Other seed fell among rocks. It began to grow, but the plant soon wilted and died for lack of moisture. Other seed fell among thorns that grew up with it and choked out the tender plants. Still other seed fell on fertile soil. This seed grew and produced a crop that was a hundred times as much as had been planted!" (vv. 4-8)

**Pausing for just a moment** and scanning the crowd, Jesus "called out, 'anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.'"

The disciples, a little confused, ask Jesus what this parable means. (v. 9)

Seemingly locking eyes simultaneously with all of those who travel with Him, Jesus replied, **"You are permitted to understand** the secrets of the Kingdom of God. But I use parables to teach the others so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled:

'When they look, they won't really see.

When they hear, they won't understand.'" (v. 10)

You see, those who know Jesus, are given a gift that helps them to understand God's Word: they are given the Holy Spirit. Although the disciples didn't quite have the Holy Spirit yet, they did have Jesus right with them.

And, although we are not walking with Jesus physically in the same way that the disciples did, we have been gifted with the Holy Spirit who is with all of us all the time.

Just a few weeks ago, a friend shared about how he lied about being a Christian and was even baptized so that He could marry the woman he loved. He would sit in church week after week, but he did not understand anything that was going on because he did not yet have the Holy Spirit.

This is what Jesus is saying here. Those who know Christ, those who have really chosen to follow Him, are able to understand what He is teaching. Those who do not believe in Him only think they know what is going on, but the words they are hearing are falling on deaf ears; they cannot really understand. They “hear” words strung together without understanding what the combination of those words actually means.

It is ONLY when the seed of God’s Word falls on soil that is ready to receive it and intentionally keeps that seed alive by cultivating God’s Word that it will grow.

**Good soil produces good life.**

**Jesus went on to explain,** “This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is God’s word. The seeds that fell on the footpath represent those who hear the message, only to have the devil come and take it away from their hearts and prevent them from believing and being saved.” (vv. 11-12)

Has anyone here ever dropped seed on a hard pathway and expected a plant to grow?

No? Why not? Hard paths really don’t make good gardens, right?

Because they are hard, they can’t accept the seed; they don’t have good soil!

Hard hearts cannot grow God’s Word because they cannot make space to listen to it.

**But let’s go on:** “The seeds on the rocky soil represent those who hear the message and receive it with joy. But since they don’t have deep roots, they believe for a while, then they fall away when they face temptation.” (v. 13)

Admittedly, living here in Florida, we don’t have a lot of rocky soil, but we do have ground that is simply not good to grow plants in. Whether the roots start growing and cannot attach themselves deeply enough due to obstructions in their path or due to our wonderful sandy yards, the point is, the roots simply don’t attach. The roots can’t attach because the soil couldn’t listen to what the seed needs to grow. Any old storm can come along and blow the plants clear away.

When we hear God’s Word but don’t listen well enough for it to take root, we fail to obey. All of a sudden something comes along that looks good and we fly away all caught up and chasing after it.

**Jesus continued explaining:** “The seeds that fell among the thorns represent those who hear the message, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life. And so, they never grow into maturity.” (v. 14)

Oooh! That one bites!

Sometimes God’s Word is welcomed, takes root, and grows, but then we get distracted and let all these other things like chasing after money, or cars, or clothes, or whatever it is for you, grow alongside our growth in God’s Word. Those other things become a fixation and we turn to tending those “weeds” rather than tending God’s Word. We let those weeds take over instead of allowing God to pluck those weeds out of our life so that we can be:

**Good soil that produces good life.**

**Listen to what Jesus says about the good soil:** “And the seeds that fell on the good soil represent honest, good-hearted people who hear God’s word, cling to it, and patiently produce a huge harvest.” (v. 15)

I learned a new term recently: **Living Soil**

Do you know what “living soil” is?

**Living soil is** as, its name implies, soil that is alive. It is active with life, like earthworms, bacteria, and fungi that help it be the best it can be.

Living soil is the best soil for life to grow in.

But, there are certain things that living soil needs in order to maintain its “aliveness.” These are things that we also need in order to keep the living soil of our hearts alive so that we can really listen to and obey God’s Word.

1. **Living soil must have organic matter added to it.** Just like living soil, we must continually have a regular pouring of God’s Living Word into our lives. We must take in what He wishes to teach us. We must spend time with Him to hear what He wants to tell us.
2. **Living soil must have compost added into it.** Compost is fuel for growth. Not that any of us are compost, but, as our lives intertwine with one another, as we add ourselves into the lives of each other, we are adding fuel for growth both individually and as a family of God.
3. **Living soil must not have chemicals poured into it.** We can think of all those things in our lives that wish to distract us from standing firm in the Word of God as chemicals that harm us. When we allow those things in, they take over and try to deplete our life.
4. **Living soil must be protected.** Put on the armor of God, right? God has given us protection. All we must do is accept it. Not only has He given us protection in Himself, but He has gifted us with one other to provide support and protection for each other.

**We are to be living soil.**

We are to be living soil because living soil is good soil and it produces good life.

**And here is a really cool thing about us being living soil.** Just as living soil must take in nutrients and produce growth which produces more living soil, we are only living soil when we allow the seed of the Word of God to grow in us, which, in turn, produces more living soil to produce more growth.

Say what?!?!

The soil must be alive for the Word of God to grow, but the soil is only made alive because of the Word of God.

In other words,

We are entirely dependent on God to be living soil that grows life.

There is no living soil apart from God.

Okay, what do we do now that we are living soil?

We reach others for Christ.

**In Luke 8:16**, Jesus went on to say, “No one lights a lamp and then covers it with a bowl or hides it under a bed. A lamp is placed on a stand, where its light can be seen by all who enter the house.”

Those who are living soil and accept the seed of the Word of God, listen to and obey the Word of God, and have the Word of God grown in them.

### **And others see it!**

That Word of God produces life, both in that person who is actively growing and in the lives of others who cannot help but see the light of God within that living soil of God’s Child.

### **That Light cannot be hidden!**

**Then Jesus added a strong caution:** “For all that is secret will eventually be brought into the open, and everything that is concealed will be brought to light and made known to all.” (v. 17)

Whoa! So, I can’t fake it? Or, well, I can fake it, but not forever. I will be found out!

**In Luke 8:18, Jesus said,** “So pay attention to how you hear. To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what they think they understand will be taken away from them.”

Let’s recap before going on:

**The hard path had received seed**...but not for long.

**The rocky soil had received seed**; it seemed that it listened to what the seed needed. The seed even started to grow, but the seed never took root because the rocky soil never really listened to what the seed needed.

**The thorny garden received seed**, and listened to the seed, but the soil wasn’t living soil, so other seeds also grew and eventually took over, not allowing the seed to mature.

**The living soil received the seed** and nurtured it. The seed grew and produced a harvest of souls, but only because it was obedient to the seed which had been planted in it.

Good soil produces good life.

We have been commissioned to bring life to people. If we are not living soil, if we are not cultivating our hearts so that we can hear the Word of God, we not only give up our own lives, we cannot bring life to others.

But, and this is important: Did you know that “hearing” is more than about listening? When we actually hear something, we take in the full scope of its implications, and we act on what we have heard.

### **We obey!**

Not too long ago, I had to say “no” to leading an activity. When I expressed my decision and reason to the correct person, the response I received was, “I hear you.” What this told me was that the person was listening past the words that came out of my mouth in order to “hear” and respect what I was really feeling.

We need to “hear” God in order to actually listen and obey.

Living soil “hears” the Word of God, the instructions of the seed, and acts on what has been heard.

### **It is obedient!**

When we are living soil, when we till the soil of our hearts, God will give us more growth than we can even begin to imagine and He will allow us to participate in gathering His harvest.

Let’s look at verse 18a again: “Pay attention to how you hear. To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given.”

God is ready and waiting to teach you more. God is ready and waiting to grow life in you. God is ready with His seed that brings life to those who will accept it, really hear it, and cultivate it.

But: if you don’t cultivate that soil, you will NOT mature!

If you know Jesus, if the seed of God’s Word has been planted in you, take the time to really “hear” Him so that He can grow you.

If you don’t know Jesus yet, He is inviting you into life. He is ready and waiting to gift you with the seed of His life.

And here’s the beauty in this: We have all been invited to be living soil. We each have the opportunity to hear what God is saying, to really listen to His words, to understand them, and to share them with others.

Cindy understood this. Cindy understood that God had called her to be living soil. Cindy understood that God had called her to help others be living soil.

Cindy “heard” God’s instructions, and she followed them. Her life was good soil that not only produced life while she was present with us but will continue to produce life for years to come.

Like Cindy and like Isaac and like every other person who has lived, is living, or is yet to live, we each have our own choice to make:

Will you be hard ground that rejects the Word of God?

Or will you be:

Good soil that produces good life?

*Your choice matters. Your choice matters for eternity.*

I would like to invite Pastor Tim up here to lead us in a time of focused prayer as a family who has been gifted with one another to grow together, to cultivate life with one another, and to share life with others.