

95-03-19Mark

He says, do you not understand this parable in verse 13? How then will you understand all the parables? We discover from this that Jesus' topic, the subject or the point of this parable, is the communication of the word of God. And to understand this parable is to understand how the word of God influences our soul, how it fits into the process of faith. And if you wanted to title or label our subject this morning, it is the process of faith.

We're going to see as we continue our study of this parable that faith is not necessarily an instantaneous, point-in-time action. Faith is a process. And this is what Jesus is communicating to us in this parable of the seed.

It's obvious even at a glance. If you think about planting a seed, you may recall we got a chia pet for Christmas. And it comes with a little packet of seed.

You have this clay animal with grooves in its body. You soak these seeds in water and then smear them on the outside of the chia pet. And before long, they sprout.

And the chia pet is sort of a vessel. There's water inside which soaks through the pottery and continues to nurture these seeds. And they grow and sprout.

And before long, you have this little green furry creature. The point there is that the seed takes time to germinate and to sprout and produce something that's visible. We don't plant the seed and instantaneously have a plant and fruit.

And that's the way it is with the seed of the Word of God. It takes time. It's a process.

When the Apostle Paul writes in Romans chapter 12, Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. That is a present tense. It's a durative present, which means it's an ongoing process.

That process of renewal and transformation is ongoing. It isn't an instantaneous action like popping popcorn. Where you heat it up and bingo, there it is in its full flower.

It's a process. Jesus gives us a wonderful picture of this process in this parable. And we have studied in some detail the six kinds of soil.

We have seen that the sower goes forth and sows the seed. Some of it falls on the hard-packed ground. We saw that the hard-packed ground represents that heart that doesn't receive the Word at all.

It doesn't let it sink in. It rejects it right at the point of hearing. We saw in Ephesians chapter 4 that this is called porosis.

And that that porosis is itself a process. And the hardening of the heart isn't an instantaneous

one-time decision. As people make a pattern of rejecting the Word, it becomes more and more difficult to receive it later on.

It creates a greater and greater callous. We saw that that word porosis was used for the development of a stone in the kidneys or in the bladder or in the other parts of the body. It was used for that part of a broken bone that builds up and mends the break.

That solidification and that incrustation over time in the joints that we call arthritis was referred to by the ancient Greek medical men as porosis. And this is something that calcification and that buildup is a process that is ongoing. It takes place over time.

And so it isn't just the one-shot decisions that we make for or against the Word of God. It's the pattern that we establish in our life. That seed can enter into us, sink deep, and grow.

And as it is nurtured over time, it can produce a plant and produce fruit. Or over time, by neglecting the Word of God, we can build up what amounts to scar tissue or a hardness, a callousness in areas of our soul where the Word of God can no longer penetrate. It's our choice.

We saw the stony soil where the seed sinks into a limited depth, but because there are rocks in the soil, it doesn't gather any root system. It isn't able to sink in and develop a foundation. And the first time the sun rises, it has no depth of root and it withers and dies.

And we saw that that was a picture of the heart that receives the Word of God, doesn't reject it at the point of hearing, but doesn't meditate on it, doesn't let it sink in deep and develop its root system. And the first time that pressure or adversity comes, it isn't sustained and it burns up and dies. Isn't it curious that it is the sunshine that causes the seed and the sprout to wither? If we planted a crop and we had no sunshine, what would happen to it? Have you ever left something out in your yard, a barrel or a can or something, and when you remove it several weeks later, the vegetation underneath is white and it's all running out trying to get out the sides and get to the light because it needs that light for the process of photosynthesis.

It needs that light to grow and to have its chemical processes work. The light is necessary for growth and that light is a picture of the pressure that comes on us, of the difficulties of life. Those pressures can do one of two things.

They can either wither and dry up the fruit of the Word in our soul or it can be that beneficial light that brings it to fruition and causes it to sprout and bear fruit. So we see once again, as we see so many places in the Word of God, that it's what we do, it's what we decide that counts. The adversity in our life can be something that withers us and crushes us and renders us unproductive or that same adversity can be the very means by which God develops the fruit of the Word and our lives produce that eternal fruit that remains and abides and reflects His glory.

We've seen the third kind of soil where the seed comes, sinks into the soil, it doesn't encounter

the stones, it develops its roots and it begins to grow, but something else is also accepted. The seed of thorns, the seed of weeds, the seed of other plants comes in and they grow up together and when it's time for the light to shine and nurture and for those plants to bear fruit, something is in the way, something chokes those plants and even though the plants are there and they have their roots, they're unproductive. The thorns have choked it out and it bears little, if any, fruit.

Jesus explained that those who are sown among thorns are the ones who hear the Word, but the cares of this world and the deceitfulness, the false allure of riches and financial security and desires for other things choke the Word and make it unfruitful. So in these three different pictures, these three different types of soil, we see different places where the process of faith breaks down. Now, if you look in your bulletin, I've done something just to keep a little variety in your life here.

There is a picture on the last page of your bulletin. You may have seen this and said, what on earth is that? Why have we got this picture here? It looks sort of like a horseshoe with the open end up and there's an arrow on the left side pointing into the horseshoe and there's an arrow on the right pointing out. This is my personal copyrighted picture of the human soul as it relates to the Word of God.

Now, if you'll notice, there are three labeled points there. Number one is at the point of input on the left side of that vessel. Number two is right down at the very bottom of the vessel and number three is on the right side at the point of exit.

If we think about the hearing of the Word of God, that is the seed that comes into the soil. That's the Word that comes into our soul. The point of hearing is that point on the left there labeled point one.

We make a decision at that point, don't we? We decide whether or not we're going to hear the Word and hearing it, whether or not we're going to accept it. Sometimes we begin to listen to someone speaking on any particular subject and we very quickly form an opinion as to their credibility, as to the value of the subject that they are talking about and we either continue to listen or we tune them out. And even though we're sitting under the sound of their words, we may or may not listen and take in what they're saying.

We make a decision at the point of hearing. That point number one there is a decision point. Will we hear? Will we put ourselves in the place to hear? Do we turn on the radio and hear a teacher teach the Word of God? Do we assemble ourselves together and listen to the teaching of the Word of God? Do we speak the truth to one another in love and communicate amongst ourselves the truth of the Word of God? Whether or not we do that is decision point number one.

Jesus represents that point with the hard-packed soil. That hard-packed soil turns off at point number one, turns off at the point of intake, doesn't accept it at all and very soon that seed is carried away and is lost. There's no benefit whatsoever.

Now, if you look down, let's assume that we do expose ourselves to the hearing of the Word of God. We listen to it and we don't reject it at the point that we hear it. We say, well, that sounds fine.

I have no argument with that. Now we come down and it has entered into our soul. But there's a second decision point there.

Now that we have heard and understood the teaching of the Word, are we going to make it the object of our faith? This has been referred to by some folks as the difference between head belief and heart belief. We can have an academic understanding of something with which we have no quarrel, but do we make it the object of our trust? You've heard my favorite illustration of this before. Think of ourselves up on top of a cliff.

There's a tree growing up there and we're very near the edge. And someone says, you see this coil of rope at the base of the tree? That rope is 500 pound test. It's a brand new nylon rope and it is guaranteed to hold 500 pounds.

We look at that coil of rope and it appears to be new. There are no frayed edges. It doesn't look like it's rotted by the sun.

And we say, I believe that. That looks like 500 pound test. I believe that would hold 500 pounds without any difficulty at all.

The person now picks up the end of that rope and ties one end around the tree and the other around our waist and says, now, descend the cliff. That's the difference between head belief and heart belief. That's the difference between acceptance and trust.

Are we willing to pin our life on that line being one 500 pound test? Are we willing to stake our life on our belief that that rope will hold our weight? This is decision point number two. Do we look at the truth of the Word of God and say, that is something that I've got to take into account as I set my priorities. This is a factor that I have to weigh as I make my decisions, as I decide what course of action I'm going to take.

And we have a decision point there. And it's possible for the process to break down at that point. It's possible that although we have a superficial acceptance of the Word of God, we don't make it the object of our faith.

We don't meditate on it day and night. We don't ask the question that Francis Schaeffer asks in the title of one of his books. How should we then live? If this truth of the Word of God is in fact true, how should we then live? What difference should this make in my life? How should I think and act differently than I have before in the light of this truth of the Word of God? If we don't ask ourselves that question, the hearing and the accepting of the Word of God does us no good.

We're like that second type of soil that Jesus points out. The soil that seems to accept the seed, but it immediately encounters some stone and some rock. Its roots don't sink in and don't produce any lasting, enduring change.

And the first time the sunshine comes, that sunshine that's supposed to nourish and cause that plant to grow and bear fruit, that same sunshine is instead going to wither and kill that plant. That opportunity for production, that opportunity for bearing fruit will be lost. Why? Because the Word of God hasn't been processed in our soul.

It hasn't been metabolized. It hasn't been taken in and allowed to nurture and to build up our soul. And so when the pressure comes, we act just the way we always have.

We go on our instincts. We go on the same procedure we've always used. The same human viewpoint, the same human answers, the same energy of the flesh efforts that we always have.

The Word of God doesn't make a difference. So this is our second decision point. Will we meditate on, make the object of our faith that Word of God? Now, let's take the case where we do that.

We have exposed ourselves to the teaching of the Word of God. We have accepted it and we have let it enter into our soul and we have said, I believe that. I'm going to try to live and think and act in the light of this truth.

There's going to come a point where God will test that knowledge and that commitment. There's going to be an opportunity to put the Word of God into application and have it actually bear fruit. Circumstances will arise.

And sometimes it is almost amusing to see how after hearing a truth and having it reinforced from the pulpit, or on the radio, or in our private devotions, within hours or within days we suddenly find ourselves in the midst of a circumstance that forces us to put that very truth into application. I'm sure many of us have had that experience. And we almost want to work the problem backwards and say, well, you know, if I wasn't in that particular study, I wouldn't be getting this particular test.

And yet, we want to move forward and not backward. And so there is a point at which we know the truth, but now it's time to put it to the test. Now the pressure is on and we're under that test of thinking under pressure.

When I was a plebe at the Naval Academy, this was a process that we went through in terms of our professional knowledge. We would be put into a classroom or we would be lined up against the bulkhead and a senior midshipman or an officer of the Navy would come in and would teach us something, perhaps how to wear a uniform, how to configure it properly. And listening to the instructor and seeing a demonstration of the proper way to rig a uniform, the proper way to line up a belt buckle, the proper way to configure the cap and shine the shoes and so forth, was a

piece of knowledge that was presented to us.

Some people were so distracted by the fact of being held at attention and in the early days of being a plebe, you're still thinking like a civilian and all you want to do is not get in trouble and they may not pay close attention. They might have not let that word of truth sink in at the point of hearing. They might have been distracted or thinking of something else or assuming that they knew it because they had been in some previous program.

Other people were standing there and they heard it and they understood it and they said, well that seems simple enough. Line up your belt buckle, make sure there's no fingerprints on your visor, make sure there's no dirt in the edges of your shoes, that sounds pretty simple. But then would come the point of application and we would have something called a uniform race where the person in charge would suddenly say, white works alpha, move.

And we would have perhaps 30 seconds or a minute to dash into our room and get into that uniform and have it properly rigged. Do we have on the right cap? Do we have on the right shirt and trousers and the right shoes? There are several different combinations. If it's working uniform blue alpha or working uniform blue delta or service dress blue or the white uniform or whatever it may be and these uniform races would test our knowledge.

Could we remember what we had learned and put it into application under pressure? And in the heat of the moment, it was quite comical to see some of the combinations of uniform items that might come out because in that limited amount of time, you had to do the best you could and then show back up and whatever you had on was what you got inspected in. Well, God does that for us. He gives us the teaching of the Word of God.

He teaches us this truth and He gives us the opportunity to meditate on it and to make it a part of our thinking and then He will and He does test us on it. The circumstances of our life will arrange themselves in such a way that we will be forced to make a decision about what we've learned and it is possible to fail at that point. Have you ever wondered where guilt comes from? Some people seem to live a life that is out of line with the Word of God and they experience no guilt.

The reason for that is they have never understood the righteous standards of God to begin with. They never got to stage two, the making the Word of God the object of faith, the belief that it's true and the understanding of what it means. And so they can go and malfunction and it doesn't really create a sense of guilt because they don't even realize that they're in violation of God's standard.

But if we understand it and we know what God is saying and we don't do it, there is a great disparity between what we do and what we know to be right. That's where our guilt comes from. If we fail between step two and step three here, God, we will have a righteous, proper sense of sorrow and sense of guilt because we know that we have failed the Lord.

And I think all of us have experienced that as well. You may recall the words of James, He that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin. That's the breakdown between number two and number three.

There are other Scriptures that tell us about these other breakdowns, but Jesus pictures that by that thorny soil. The seed is there, it has sprouted up and it's in a position to bear fruit, but we let something else get in its way. We fall back on the thorn bush.

We fall back on the old human worldly ways of operating. And we know better and we're without excuse. And so we fail at that point three.

So as we think about faith, think about those three decision points. We've talked a lot about faith in the context of faith, hope, and love. We've seen it over and over again in Colossians.

We've seen that it is one of the three most important things to concentrate on as believers in the Christian life. So it's helpful to understand the process of faith and the places where it can break down. This is why Jesus teaches the parable of the sower and the seed and the soil.

Jesus says, look, if you understand this parable, you're going to be in good shape to understand all the parables. Why? Because this tells us the process of taking in and benefiting from the fruit, from that seed, so that we will bear fruit. If we don't understand this parable, how will we understand any of the parables? If we don't understand the process by which the Word of God becomes the object of our faith and bears fruit in our life, we're in real trouble.

So Jesus teaches this parable. Now, I'd like to point out to you that we reviewed the principle of interpreting a parable and we said that parables never teach a new truth. They illustrate and reinforce a truth that is taught elsewhere in Scripture.

And that is the case here as well. So I'd like to point out a few of the other Scriptures that teach us these same truths. First of all, turn with me to Proverbs 1, verse 20.

Proverbs 1, verse 20. This is going to be a Scripture that deals with that first decision point. What do we do at the point that we hear the Word of God? Proverbs 1, verse 20.

This is wisdom personified. This is the truth of the Word of God speaking as though it were a person. Wisdom calls aloud outside.

She raises her voice in the open squares. She cries out in the chief concourses at the openings of the gates in the city. This reminds us of Jesus teaching the crowds.

The truth of the Word of God is being broadcast in public where everyone can hear it. There's no reason not to hear the Word of Truth. How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge.

Turn at my rebuke. Surely I will pour out My Spirit on you. I will make My words known to you.

Notice the ministry of God, the Holy Spirit, as we've studied it in the New Testament. It is the Holy Spirit that gives us insight and understanding into the Word of God. That's the Holy Spirit's primary ministry.

We've seen it in John, chapters 14, 15, and 16. Jesus said, I will send you another Comforter. He will lead you into all truth.

He will take of the things pertaining to Me and translate them to you. He will call to your mind all of the things that I have commanded you. This is the ministry of the Spirit.

The voice of the Spirit is the Word of God. I spoke to a young lady this week on the phone. I mentioned this on Wednesday night briefly.

This young lady resided in Alabama and received a word from the Lord. The voice of the Holy Spirit spoke to her and told her to move to Tulsa and go to a particular school. And she came here and was unable to support herself in Tulsa and move to Tahlequah to go to NSU.

But she has been unhappy there and has about decided to go back to Tulsa. And so she was calling pastors in the area, including myself, for confirmation that this was the will of God for her. And having come from a background, a Christian background, that emphasized the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the communication of the Holy Spirit, her idea of ascertaining the will of God is somewhat confused.

Because first of all, everything in her understanding revolves around the will of God for her life. And there is a distinction, isn't there, between God being in the orbit around us, aiding and making our life better, and giving us the right decisions and the right place to live and the right school to go to, so that our life will turn out for the best, rather than God being at the center of consideration. And we seek to understand and fit ourselves into His will.

And that reversed perspective creates all kinds of problems. Because now, we are looking for the Word of God as it pertains to our life, our problems, our decision points, and we're basically seeking our own good, rather than the purpose of the will of God. And when God brings that sunshine, that adversity into our life, so that the Word of God will bear fruit, instead we see that sunshine as something that is withering us and crumpling us, and we try to find the shade.

How can I get out from under this pressure? How can I get out from under this test? This is hurting me. This is withering me up. And so, the pursuit of the will of God becomes the pursuit of better circumstances, of relief from pressure.

And we find ourselves hopelessly muddled and hopelessly confused about the plan of God, the will of God, the Word of God, and we don't even know what the source of the Word of God is

anymore. The Bible is clear that we have the mind of Christ. These scriptures that are before us are the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Paul compares it to the sword that is in the hand of the Spirit. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. That's what he uses to communicate with us, to transform us and to change us.

Surely I will pour out my Spirit on you. I will make my words known to you. But look in verse 24 of chapter 1 of Proverbs.

Because I have called and you refused. Here's our hard-packed soil. There's that porosis, that rejection of the Word right at the point of hearing.

I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded. Because you disdained all my counsel and would have none of my rebuke. There's that rebuking of the Word.

The Word ought to rebuke us. It ought to correct us. It ought to step on our toes and inflict a little pain on us from time to time.

Otherwise, there will be no change. There will be no benefit. We ought to come away feeling scolded from time to time.

We ought to feel chastened. But some of us as believers will have none of the rebuke of God. The Word of God in the hands of the Holy Spirit showing us where we're wrong.

Pricking us in our ego. Showing us where we fail. We don't like that.

It's painful. But if we reject that counsel, reject that rebuke, wisdom says, I will laugh at your calamity. I will mock when your terror comes.

Now this is not God himself laughing at us and mocking us when our calamity comes. This is wisdom. These principles of truth are going to come back to haunt us when we find ourselves in the midst of failure.

And when we find ourselves in the midst of discipline, we're going to remember the Word of the Lord and we're going to be convicted. And we're going to have a sense of guilt. We're going to realize, I did not heed the Word and now here is the result.

I am experiencing the discipline that comes from disobedience. And that wisdom will point out to us the folly of our ways. It will laugh at our calamity and mock us when terror comes.

Our terror will come because we will be out of the will of God. The fruit of the peace, among other things. And we won't have that peace.

The terrors of discipline will strike us. Distress and anguish will come upon us. Notice what wisdom says in verse 28.

They will call on me but I will not answer. Why is that? Here we are in the midst of calamity and now we suddenly want to switch horses in midstream. We've talked about the fact that rejection of the Word of God is a process.

It's a pattern. Acceptance and pursuit of the Word of God is a process. It's a pattern.

It's a way of life. And if we make a pattern and a habit out of rejecting the Word of the Lord and we suddenly find ourselves in the midst of discipline and we suddenly make a one-shot decision. Oh, I'm going to get down there to the church.

I'm going to listen to a sermon. That will get me back in God's good graces. That will fix my problem.

God will forgive me and bless me and I'll be right back on the good road where I'm not experiencing pain and suffering. That's not going to happen. Not on the basis of a one-shot decision.

These things are patterns. Soil doesn't get hard-packed from a single footprint. It gets hard-packed over time with much traffic, with a lot of feet pounding it into hardness.

And we can pound our own soul into hardness by rejecting the Word of the Lord. And a quick superficial decision to run down to the church when pressure hits isn't sufficient. We will have to endure that chastening that brings us to genuine repentance, that changes the pattern of our thinking so that we make a habit of exposing ourselves to the Word of God.

And we start pursuing God's will and God's plan rather than pursuing God so that He will fulfill our will and our plan. So these things are a pattern and it's important to understand. Now let's take a look at a scripture that talks about rejection at that second point.

We've heard the Word, but we don't make it the object of our faith. We've seen this passage before over in Ezekiel chapter 33, verse 30 and following. Ezekiel chapter 33.

Ezekiel brings a word from the Lord to the people of Israel, starting in verse 30. As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses. And they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, please come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord.

This is that second type of soil, the soil that has the stones in it. It receives the word with joy, receives the word with gladness. There's no rejection at the point of hearing.

They say, come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord. So they come to you as people do. They sit before you as my people and they hear your words, but what? They do not do them.

For with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. Their hearts pursue something else. This little set of rectangles that you see down below, that decision point number two, that is where we accept and make the word of God the object of our faith.

And it stays there. It remains. It sinks its roots in and it's there as a resource.

It's one of the arrows in our quiver. It's one of the rounds of ammunition in our stockpile. It's one of those sources of strength and power that may stay there for a time until the occasion comes to put it into application.

But it's there in our soul. It's that solid rock upon which our life is founded. It's not a rock that rejects and pushes away the rebuke and the correction of the word.

Instead, it becomes a foundation. It becomes a resource in our soul. If we in our hearts pursue something else as the foundation of our thinking, as the source of our priorities and our actions and our thinking, then it isn't going to be there.

It's going to be rejected at that point. It isn't really what we trust. We talk a great fight, but in action and in practice, we think on the basis of human standards, human wisdom, human experience.

This is what Israel has done here. With their mouth, they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. Now, let's take a look at a Scripture that talks about that third decision point.

Turn with me over to James 4. We can expose ourselves to the teaching of the Word of God. We can accept it. We can meditate on it and make it the object of our trust.

We can believe it and build our standards and our viewpoint on it. But notice what James says here in James 4, verse 17. To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

We know what it is that we need to do, but we fail to do it. There's a problem at the point of application. And Jesus pictures that by those thorn bushes that grow up and choke the Word so that it is unfruitful.

And even though we learn the Word and even though we know the Word and we believe it and trust in it, we can fail at the point of application. And I would submit to you that this may be the place where most of us have our problem. Most of us expose ourselves to the teaching of the Word of God.

Hopefully, we do it on a regular basis. Once a week is certainly not enough. I wouldn't want to eat one meal a week and expect to be physically healthy.

And our soul cannot subsist on one sermon a week or even two sermons a week. The Word of God should be our daily bread. We reflect the Word of God in our prayers.

And the pattern of our prayers is at least three times a day. Daniel prayed three times a day. David said, evening and morning and at noon will I pray and cry aloud.

Conversations are best when they're balanced, aren't they? When each party in the conversation has pretty much an equal opportunity to speak. And yet, a lot of our conversation with God is one way. We spend a lot more time praying to God than we do listening to God.

So, we need to take advantage of every opportunity for that seed to be scattered. And that's the beginning of the process. We need to meditate on that Word of Truth day and night.

That's the way to be the tree planted by the rivers of water. But even there, we can't assume that because we've heard and because we've meditated and trusted in, that we're finished. There's a point of application that we need to identify and have the courage and the spiritual strength to step out in application faith.

Saying, I know what God says is true, therefore, I'm going to act on it. And it may seem crazy from a human point of view. It may not make any sense to people around me, but I'm placing my faith in what God says.

God says, seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all of your provision will be taken care of. If there's a problem in provision, chances are there's a problem in pursuit of the kingdom of God and His righteousness. We claim that promise that God will supply all of our needs according to His riches and glory, but we don't always meditate on the condition of that promise.

Seek first the kingdom, seek first His righteousness, and all of these things will be added unto you. It's important for us to meditate and then at the point of application, make that final set of decisions that bears the fruit of the word in our lives. Now, there are passages of scripture where you will see all three of these.

We don't have time to look at all of them, but in Joshua 1.8, way back when Israel first entered the land of Canaan, this book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth. It needs to be spoken, it needs to be heard, it needs to be communicated. That's point one.

Thou shalt meditate therein day and night. That's step two. That's that second set of decisions to make it the object of our thinking and our meditations and our faith, our belief and our trust.

Thou shalt meditate therein day and night that thou mayest observe to do all that is written therein. That's that third stage. Observe to do it.

It takes all three. We have to hear it, we have to believe it and trust it, meditate on it, let it change our thinking, and then observe to do those things that it tells us to do. We need to put into practice the obvious results of that thinking.

James 1.22-25, we're familiar with that be doers of the word and not hearers only passage. But what does James say there? Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, stage one, and continueth therein, stage two. Being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, stage three.

Over and over again in scripture, these areas in the process of faith are emphasized and pointed out to us. And we can analyze ourselves in this way. Why is it that some of the soil doesn't produce at all? Why is it that some of the soil produces thirtyfold? Some of it produces sixtyfold and some of it produces a hundredfold.

Well, it becomes clear to us, doesn't it? How much of the seed passes all three of those decision points in our life? How often do we expose ourselves to the teaching of the word? We could have a hundred percent multiplication rate, but if we only listen to a little bit of the word, there's only going to be a little bit of the crop. We can't manufacture truth of the word of God. If we don't hear it taught from scripture, how can it be processed in our soul and bear that fruit? So if we want to be a hundredfold believer, and hopefully we all do, the first step, the first necessary step is to be sure that we're maximizing our exposure to the word of God.

Be sure that we're hearing it as often as possible. What could there be in our life that is more important than bearing this fruit? Is there a higher priority? That fruit includes evangelism. That fruit includes reflecting the glory of Jesus Christ.

That fruit includes having a life that has meaning and purpose and that God can use for the furtherance of his plan and his glory both now and in the eternal future. Our life is writing a record that will exist for all eternity. What could be more important? It begins with hearing the word.

Secondly, we've got to make it the object of our faith. How much of the word do we not only hear, but we think about? And we say, what difference does this make? How should we then live if this is true? How does this apply to my life, my circumstances? That's the second point at which some of that seed can fail. Some of that seed can be stopped from bearing fruit.

And then finally, that third point. If we have the opportunity to hear the word, and we have the opportunity to believe it, and trust it, there's going to come a point of application, of putting it into practice, of letting it bear fruit in our lives. Do we think about that? Do we concentrate on it? Do we watch for those opportunities and say, here I am, this is the test.

How will we know when we're in that test? The sun is going to be shining. The plant is either going to wither or it's going to grow. We decide what we do with adversity.

We decide how we view testing and pressure. And we can endure that tribulation with joy if we see that it is the means of our growth. It's the means of our production.

It's what brings vitality and nurturing and nutrition into that plant. It's what makes the plant grow and be in a position to bear fruit. Or we can say, boy, that sun is hot.

I've got to find some shade. Let's get these thorns up here and shield me. Shields it from the sun, but it also chokes it off so that there's no production.

Over and over again, we have dozens of Scriptures. I've just pointed out a few. Go back and look at our Scripture reading on wisdom this morning.

In the light of these three decision points, and you can see clearly, God wants us to hear the Word. How often do we assemble? How often do we pursue the scattering of that seed in our soil? If we want to be a hundred-fold believer, it's got to be more than once a week. It's got to be more than twice a week.

We've got to take in as much as we can hold. Then we've got to think about it. Meditate on it.

Let it get that second decision point. Get it past that. Make it a part of the resources in our soul.

Be not conformed to this world. If we don't want to be conformed to this world, what do we need? Transformation. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

That's how to make our bodies a living sacrifice. That's how to get to that point of application and bearing fruit. That's what Jesus is telling us here in the parable of the sower, the seed, and the soils.

If we understand this parable, all of the other parables will do us a lot of good. But if we don't understand this parable, how can we benefit from any of the others? That's the message that Jesus leaves us. That's the challenge that he gives us this morning.

Let's close now in a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for your grace in not only saving us and rescuing us from a hopeless condition, but including us in your plan and making us a part of the means by which you reflect your glory and communicate the truth of your character to every creature that you have created. We know that we are displayed before the angels and that they look at us intently.

They see your dealing with us and in that they see your grace and your love, your long-suffering. We see that ourselves as human beings. We see in your dealings with our sins and with our failures and our weakened condition.

We see the manifestation of your grace and your love. We see it summed up in the person of Jesus Christ who did not continue to hold on to his equality with you in terms of his deity, but he took on the form of a servant and he came down and suffered the same vagaries of life that we suffer. He experienced the hunger and the thirst.

He experienced rejection. He experienced the disapproval of people. He experienced the limitations that we as human beings labor under.

And he did it to reflect and to manifest that love that you have for us and that great love that he manifested in sacrificing himself on our behalf so that we might have a relationship with you. We pray, Father, that as a result of that relationship, as a result of our faith in the work of Jesus Christ and our entry into your family and into your plan, that your word will enter into our souls and bear fruit. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will make it real to us, will confront us with the issues of the truth as we face each day.

We pray that our priorities and our thinking will be transformed by the renewing of our minds, by that living and powerful word of truth. We pray that we will be able to exploit those opportunities to hear the word, that we will have those quiet moments where we can meditate and reflect on it, make it the object of our faith. And we pray that you will give us those opportunities to put it into practice, to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with those who are unsaved, to reflect in our lives and in our daily walk the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit that is born by the word in your soul, in our souls.

And we ask all these things now in Jesus' name. Amen.