

ESF, Lord's day service message
April 7, 2019

Cultivate Your Heart to Be Good Soil

Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23

³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear."

¹⁸ "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ²² The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

Here in this parable, Jesus compares God's word to seed and compares our hearts to soil. The seed of the word is the best seed. Because it has supernatural power in it. What supernatural power? The power of God's creation, the power of eternal life, the power to heal the sick, the power to save sinners, the power to overcome all darkness, the power to produce 30, 60, 100 times more than what is sown.

God has given the seed of the word to us. The seed is available free of charge. The only action we need to take is being receptive and faithful to the word.

To do so, we need to cultivate our hearts to receive the seed well and allow it to grow well. There are three hearts we can cultivate. They are SDS hearts. SDS stands for Soft, Deep and Simple.

Make your heart soft

The first type of heart which must be cultivated is a hardened heart. It is like the soil described in this parable as “the path.” There are paths around farmers’ fields. The soil of the paths is so hard that the seed is unable to penetrate the soil. The seed remains on top of the ground and it dies either by people trampling it or birds eating it. To make such hard path soft, farmers must plow the path to make it soft.

When our hearts are hard, God’s word cannot penetrate them. What are hardened hearts? How do our hearts become hard? How can we plow our hardened hearts to be soft?

First, our hearts must be born again.

The hearts of unbelievers are like pathway soil. They think that the word is just teaching of religion. They have no ability to understand the spiritual meaning in the word. They cannot accept the word as eternal truth from the living God. They do not have any interest in hearing the word. If they hear the word, the word remains only as knowledge which they want nothing to do with. If your heart is like this, you must seek God’s mercy. You must pray to God to touch your heart so that it will be spiritually born again so you can understand the spiritual meaning of the word. Then you can take it as food and nourishment for your soul.

Second, we must always humble ourselves before God’s word.

If we think that we know something or everything about certain word we hear, and do not try to be touched or renewed by God's living Spirit every time we hear it, we make our hearts hardened.

We may have heard the same word many times. And we may think that we know all the truth of that word. But whenever we hear the same word, we must always recognize that God speaks something new and gives new blessings through the same word. We should never think that we know enough or know everything of any word of God. Even if we have heard a certain word many times, if we hear the same word again, we must believe that there are still new spiritual blessings in that word.

Before you hear the same word of God, always prepare your heart to be humbled. Pray that the Lord will give you a humble heart so that your heart becomes receptive to God's new blessings in the same word. When you read a word which you have read many times before, expect and seek a new spiritual blessing in that word.

Third, we must discipline ourselves to obey the word we hear.

If we hear and understand the word without obeying it, the word remains in our head just as knowledge. It does not penetrate our hearts. It does not make any difference. It remains superficial. Such superficial knowledge of the word is no better than the devil's knowledge of God. James 2:18 says, "*You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that and shudder.*" What makes your heart soft is not how much you know about God's word but how much you obey God's word. While we obey God's word, the word penetrates our hearts. They work in our hearts and produce results.

So, to make our hearts soft and receptive we must surrender ourselves to the word.

Make your heart deep

The next type of soil that must be cultivated is rocky soil. Rocky soil has rocks under a thin layer of soil. When a seed is sown into rocky soil, the seed may spring up quickly. But the seed's root can't penetrate the rock and remains shallowly rooted in the thin layer of soil. And, when the sun shines upon the soil, the soil easily dries up and the seed in it dies. In rocky soil, the reason the seed dies is not because of the heat of scorching sun, but because it doesn't have deep roots to withstand the heat of sun.

To turn rocky soil into good soil, farmers remove the rocks in the ground and makes the soil bed deep.

To receive the word of God in our hearts and let it grow and be fruitful, we must cultivate our hearts to be free of rocks so that the word can be rooted deeply in our hearts.

Then what could be the rocks that make our hearts shallow? How can we get rid of the rocks and cultivate our hearts to be deep?

First, our emotions may make rocks in our hearts.

If we receive God's word mainly through feelings, the word cannot take root deeply into our hearts. Feelings are God's gifts. We need them to be touched and moved by God's words. But to make the word grow steadily in our hearts, we need more than just good feelings. Feelings are unpredictable and change constantly.

If we accept and respond to God's word mainly through feelings, we can't keep the word in our hearts when we become emotionally weak.

So, to make your heart have deep roots, do not trust the word of God on your feelings. Even if you feel depressed while you are following the word, keep believing that God's word is good for you. Even if you don't feel anything from a word, trust that the word is truth and it is your spiritual food.

Secondly, fear of trials may become the rocks in our hearts.

If we follow the word only when there is no trial, our hearts become shallow. To make our hearts deep, we must endure trials. While we are obeying the word of God, trials may come into our lives. Trials work in our lives like the sun works for the plant. They test our faith in the word and make it strong. It is not trials which destroy the word in our hearts, but it is our timid and weak hearts which cannot endure trials. When you face trials while you are following the word of God, do not try to avoid trials but take all kinds of trials as God's given opportunities to deepen your heart. Remember Jesus' encouraging word: *In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world (John 16:33).*

Third, grudges and bitterness also become rocks in our hearts.

If you let grudges, bitterness, and an unforgiving spirit remain in your heart, they become harder and harder. Eventually they become rocks in your heart. Then the word of God cannot become deeply rooted into your heart.

So, to make your heart deep, you must remove grudges and bitterness from your heart. How? You cannot get rid of grudges and bitterness through your own effort alone. Think about how Jesus has forgiven you, and how patient He has been with you. When Jesus' forgiving grace and enduring patience fill your heart, grudges and bitterness are broken and gone. Your heart will become deep so that God's word keeps growing in your heart.

Make your heart simple

The third type of soil which must be cultivated is the thorny soil. Thorns consume the water and nutrients that should be used for nourishing soil. They grow quickly and they choke the plants of the seeds. To make thorny soil into good soil, farmers pull out thorns from the soil and make the soil pure and simple.

Then what could be thorns in our hearts that consume our desire and keep us being fruitful? How can we remove the thorns in our hearts and make them simple?

First, there are desires in this world which overtake the desire for following God's words.

Not all desires are bad or wrong desires. But when our desires for something in the world become stronger than our desire for the word of God, our hearts are divided. The pursuit of worldly things, especially of money, consumes the energy that should be used to pursue spiritual wealth. And eventually our hearts will have little desire or no desire for spiritual matters.

To make our hearts productive with the word of God we must control all desires, not to let them overtake the desire for God. How can we do that?

We must control our desires in their early stages, before they grow to be a powerful force choking our desire for the Lord.

James 1:14-15 “.... *each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*”

Samson was chosen by God to live for Him and His people. He had a desire to follow God's call. God anointed him to be powerful. But one day he had a desire to pursuing women. His parents advised him to control the desire. But Samson did not take the advice seriously and kept carrying the desire for women in his heart. The desire for women became stronger and stronger and it overtook his desire for serving God. Eventually he became very weak spiritually and lost his spiritual power. He was arrested by the Philistines and died with them.

Jesus chose Judas Iscariot to be one of His 12 disciples. Initially, Judas had a desire for God's word. He had a desire to follow Christ. But at some point, he had a desire for money which was stronger than his

desire for Christ. The desire for money became stronger and stronger and finally it overtook his desire for Christ. He betrayed Christ to gain 30 silver coins (Matthew 26:14-16). His desire for money led him to self-destruction (Matthew 27:3-5).

Do not underestimate the danger of your desire for anything in this world if it is stronger than your desire for God. Deal with it at its beginning stage.

If there is any desire that takes your heart away from God, and it has grown strong and you can't control it by your own will, confess it before God and ask Him to give you the cleansing power of Jesus' blood and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit. God will honor your sincere prayer for change. He will set you free from the uncontrollable desire. He will simplify your heart to focus on desiring His word.

Secondly, the thorns are worries.

Worries choke our desire for the word of God. To pull out all the worries from our hearts, we must desire the most important thing first.

Jesus said, *“Do not worry, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’... But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”*

(Matthew 6:3, 33). Whatever you do, always do it for God's glory. Make money to do God's business. Develop your talents to do something good for the Lord. Desire everything for God's glory.

Then God will take care of all your needs. God will help you trust in Him for all your needs. He will set you free from worries. Your heart will be filled with a simple trust in God. The word in your heart will keep growing and produce lots of fruits.