

# The Parable of the Sower, Seed, and Two Soils (Luke 8:4-15)

## Context:

- Jesus has presumably departed from Nain and continues His preaching ministry by the sea (of Galilee; Mk. 4:1).
- A great crowd has followed Him, and He now transitions to the first parable recorded in all synoptic gospels (Matt. 13:1-15; Mk. 4:1-20; Lk. 8:4-15).

## 1. The Sower and the Seed (v.5-11)

- Parables are more than “an earthy picture with a heavenly meaning.” They are intended to both reveal and conceal.
- After giving the parable of the soil, seed, and two (four) soils, Jesus’ disciples did not understand the parable (v.5-9).
- Only the disciples and “those around them” came to Jesus when He was alone (Mk. 4:10), inquiring about the parable’s meaning.
- The parable is a “secret” which must be revealed. Jesus knows the secret to the kingdom because He holds the “keys” Himself (as God’s anointed King).
- The parable is enigmatic and a judgment for those who do not “hear.”
  - Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 (v.10) to describe the crowd following Him.
  - During the time of Isaiah, the nation of Israel disdained Isaiah and likened his teaching to that of a “kindergartener” (Isa. 28:9-10). Regardless of Isaiah’s pleadings and exhortations, they refused his message to turn to the Lord.
- The disciples benefit from the explanation not because of their merit but because of His grace: “to you, it has been given to know the ‘secrets’ of the kingdom of God.”
- Jesus is combining divine choice and the people’s guilt as the reason for the parable. It is a participle of judgment, meaning He anchors their rejection because they reject Him.
- While Jesus’ teaching has enamored the crowd, they are spectators and not disciples, as they have avoided His pleadings to repent and follow Him.
- Jesus is the Sower, and the Word of God is the seed.
  - During planting season, the sower would have a bag of seed slung over his shoulder. The Mishnah (oral tradition) decreed that farming should be “orderly” so that none of the seed is “wasted.”
  - The sower was to cast seed in areas that he believed to be good ground (soil).

\*Caveat: You cannot derive a soteriological (salvation) system from parables.

## 2. The Soil (v.5-8, 12-15)

- Jesus’ parable depicts a farmer casting seed which “falls” on four kinds of soil that can essentially be divided into two categories of soil.

### Unreceptive Soil #1: The “path” (v.5, 12):

- Some seed fell “along the path.” Roads in the ancient world did not skirt around properties but instead cut right through the middle of fields, with the crops growing up to the road itself.
- While a farmer would never deliberately throw good seed onto the hardened packed road, a few seeds would land there because of the wind conditions.
- The birds, which represent Satan (and presumably) his host, “steal” or “take away” the seed (the Word of God).
- This “hardpan” (hard-packed soil) symbolizes the heart of those who listen to Jesus with prejudice, unwilling to repent and follow Him.
- There is no possibility of conversion as it stands, for not only is the soil of the heart hardened, but Satan steals away the seed.

### Unreceptive Soil #2: the shallow soil above the “shale and limestone” (v.6, 13):

- Another seed “fell” on the rock. These are not “boulders” or “large stones” but layers of limestone and shale that were present several inches below the surface that would trap the rain and keep it from penetrating beneath the soil.
- This soil would receive the seed (Word of God) with joy (at least initially).
- The seed would germinate “exponentially” then wither and die because of the glaring sun and shallow soil hindering the roots from growing deep. While there was rich “topsoil,” it was shallow.
- They “fall away” (the plant dies) because of the time of testing:
  - Jesus gives a generic occasion for the falling away yet does not give the circumstance of the falling away. This is intentional, as the testing time purposely assesses the composition of the thing tested (root system).
  - While the “testing” comes primarily through persecution (Mk. 4:17), it can also come through other means.
- While the seed in this kind of soil germinates and has an impressive initial “growth,” it dies because the soil is shallow.
- Feelings are essential to the Christian faith, but joy must be derivative from the substance of that faith beyond the mere shallowness of strict emotion, for shallow spiritual mindedness and emotionalism cannot stand the time (season) of testing.

### Unreceptive Soil #3: the presence of thorns (weeds) and “competing affections” (v.7, 14):

- The soil was soft (as opposed to the “path”) and deeper (as opposed to the layer of rock).
- There is germination, yet thorns (weeds) have stolen moisture from the soil and compromised the integrity of the root system to bear fruit.
- While the gospel truths take root in their hearts, their loyalty to Him is divided, ultimately leading to no fruit. What happened?
  - The pleasures of life and the cares of the world choke out the Word, proving unfruitful (Mk. 4:19).
- There is a refusal to take up the cross daily, and at its core, there are irreconcilable loyalties. While there is a gesture toward Christ and perhaps no outward qualms about the core tenets of the faith, worldly cares occupy their minds and hearts.
- Ultimately, like the seed on the hardpan and shallow soil, it is not established (Mk. 4:19).

### The Receptive Soil (v.7, 15):

- It appears the seed will not come to fruition until it falls on good soil that receives it and produces a “hundredfold.” This is unheard of, as no crop the Near East used could produce this much “fruit.”
- The bearing of much fruit is because the DNA of the seed reaches fruition within a receptive soil with no competing desires.

There are three possible outcomes as the Word of God is spread: No growth, growth but no fruit, growth and bearing fruit. The growth of the seed, the presence and choking character of the thorns (weeds), and the bearing of fruit are subtle and take time. The only soil representing a regenerated saint is the “good soil,” not just because of the yield but because it persevered.

The parable’s point is not comfort but discomfort. To fall away in Scripture is to fall away from God’s Word and reach the point where faith is no longer present. Faith that appears briefly is not faith because genuine faith perseveres (Jn. 15:1-5; Col. 1:21-23; 2 Jn. 9).

### Point of Application: