



Life Guide

applying God's Word to life

Dear Christian, My Word Has Made You Grow! July 26, 2020

(Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23) That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ²Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹Whoever has ears, let them hear.” ¹⁸“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹When 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. ²⁰The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ²²The 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. ²³But 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.”

1. Name two or three parables from Scripture that come to mind. What's your favorite Bible parable? Why? **Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:24-30); Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:23-35); Parable of the Persistent Widow (Luke 18:1-8).** One of my favorites is the Parable of the Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-32) because it reminds me of the Father's undying love for me, running out to meet me on the road and welcome me as his son!

2. What does it mean to “play” Monday morning quarterback? Why is this so dangerous to do when we second-guess God's ways and works? **Literally, a Monday morning quarterback is someone who with the help of 20/20 hindsight reflects on how he would have played the previous days football game differently than the men on the field or the coach on the sideline. Beyond the sport's world, the term applies to anyone who, after the fact, reflects on how he or she would have done at better job than what was done. It's so dangerous to second guess God because is an expression of sinful arrogance than refuses to humbly acknowledge that God's ways our best. When it comes to our salvation, Christ is the only way to heaven. If we think we have a better way, we are sure to be lost eternally.**
3. What's a parable? Why did Jesus teach in parables? (cf. Matthew 13:10-17). **There are many definitions for a parable. No one definition covers all the different ways that Jesus uses stories to present kingdom truths. Many of us are most familiar with the definition we learned as children: “An earthly story with a heavenly meaning.” This certainly works. The verses between our assigned text present us with some challenging thoughts. Jesus quotes the Prophet Isaiah, who like Jesus, faced great opposition. Jesus explains that Parables advance God's kingdom in one of two ways. For some, the stories will be dismissed as foolish and so these people will identify themselves as the enemies of God that they truly are. While their loss is tragic, being able to properly identify these enemies will prevent believers from being misled by the “wolves in sheep's clothing.” For believers, Jesus' parables are a source of wisdom, bringing gospel assurance to their lives and instructing them in the way to live their lives of thanks to God. There's another thought here that is worthy of consideration. So that we do not think that Jesus was treating part of his audience as a “lost cause,” the parables served as a teaching tool by which Jesus sought to give people, who otherwise dismissed him, an opportunity to reflect on a biblical truth through a message connected to familiar scenes from their everyday life. Parables can be “disarming.” And they can stay**

with an individual as he continues to turn the truths over in his mind.

4. Identify: 1) the Sower; 2) the seed; 3) the soil. The Sower is Jesus; The seed is Jesus' saving gospel; The soil is the hearts and minds of sinners.
5. The gospel is not "irresistible." Using the parable, explain why some people reject the gospel of Jesus. Those represented by the hard-packed soil of the path are people who refuse to give Jesus and his teachings a second thought because they have already judged Jesus to be a fake. They decided that there's nothing to be gained by listening to him. The devil snatches the gospel away from them before it can take root. Those represented by the shallow soil that covers rocks and stones are people who welcome the message with joy, but when that same message causes them trouble and pain, they quickly fall away. These might be people who thought that being Christians meant they'd never have any problems. Instead they discover that the world hates them because he first hated Jesus. They soon disown the Savior. Those represented by the soil filled with thorns and thistles have their faith choked off by worries that focus on the pursuit of earthly wealth. They are so convinced that having a bit more money will solve their problems that they have no time for Jesus.
6. Agree or disagree and why? Some people come to faith in Jesus because they don't resist Jesus' gospel as much as others do. Disagree. This is a false and dangerous statement. The Bible teaches that by nature all sinners are equally lost and damned. It's not possible for one who is "dead in sin" to participate in his or her conversion in any way. The person who takes credit for becoming a Christian puts himself in danger of eternal death. The Bible teaches that we are saved by grace alone through faith – a gift from God for which we can take no credit at all (Ephesians 2:8-9).
7. Agree or disagree and why? Some people are lost because God never planned to take them to heaven. Disagree. The Bible teaches that God wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). While it's true that the Bible teaches that God chose people to be his own before time began, it makes it very clear that God has not chosen anyone to be damned. The teaching of "double predestination" is a false teaching. The teaching of "Election" God's choosing people to be his own, is given to us to comfort us. God wants us to know that we are not "spiritual accidents." He wants us to know that he has always loved us and has always planned to have us with him. It is a gross misuse of this teaching to conclude that God wanted to save some and not others. Our finite minds are incapable of solving this matter with reason. We won't be able to explain this to people's satisfaction. But we can say what Scripture says: God wants all people to be saved. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. (Ezekiel 33:11).
8. Pastor said that if he were going to send a Savior to rescue sinners, he'd probably send "Rambo." Explain how God's plan differs and why his plan is "better" (perfect). God didn't send a military hero. He sent his perfect Son in the person of a tiny baby. The child grew up to be perfect humble, perfectly loving, perfectly patient. This is the perfect plan of salvation because Jesus lived this life as the Substitute of you and me and every sinner. Then Jesus offered up his perfect life as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. Only the perfect Son of God could satisfy God's wrath in our place and only the Son of God could destroy death by dying and rising. Only God could devise and carry out this perfect plan of salvation.
9. Describe the blessings that come from knowing that God's ways are not our ways. How will this truth help you face the week ahead? So much of my week is spent fretting and worrying. It's such a foolish waste of time. God wants me to know that he's busy working in my life every moment of every day. I worry and fret because things are not going "my way." The truth is, God's way is better. He's working all things for

my good. What looks like a problem is really going to be something that God makes a blessing. If only I would hold tightly to this truth and recall it through the week, I could stop fretting and worrying. I could spend my time instead, anticipating the blessing that God is working. When I do doubt this, I need only recall how God's entire plan of salvation follows this same pattern. What looked like Jesus' worst defeat, what his greatest victory and mine. Projecting this truth into my life, I can rejoice to know that even death is not going to be something terrible for me. Instead, Jesus will use it to bring me safely to his waiting arms. Peace and contentment are the great blessings that come from trusting God's promises and plans for my life.

10. How can you grow in your faith? Faith grows in the same way it was born – through the power of the gospel in Word and sacrament. If I want my faith to grow, I can reflect on the blessings of my baptism each day, I can be a frequent guest at the Lord's Table, and every day I can spend time in the Scriptures, meditating throughout the day on the promises that God makes to me in Christ.

Jesus Speaks in Parables

The Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13:1–9

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ²Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹He who has ears, let him hear.”

From that crowded house, where Jesus' mother and brothers could

not get close enough to speak to Jesus directly, Jesus went out to the shore of the Sea of Galilee. In the outdoors a much larger crowd could get close enough to hear him speak. As the people crowded around him, Jesus got into a boat and moved a short distance from the shore. With this arrangement even more people could hear him.

Then he proceeded to teach the people about the kingdom of God. He spoke in parables, and he later explained why he liked to use this approach. Parables are simple stories based on everyday happenings that would be familiar to the listeners, although they do not report actual events. They illustrate specific truths concerning the kingdom of God. Sometimes all the details of a parable support the primary point of the parable. In other cases it is not at all helpful to attempt to find meaning in every detail. Parables are like pictures. They convey an immediate impression overall, but some of the details may be irrelevant. It is important to keep this in mind when interpreting parables.

In this chapter Matthew reports seven parables that Jesus spoke. Some of them Jesus explains; some of them he does not. He also tells us why he chooses to speak in parables so often. All of these parables teach important truths concerning the kingdom of God, and that is true of Jesus' parables in general. The kingdom of God, after all, is not a visible earthly organization occupying a specific amount of territory in this world. The kingdom of God is God's dominion, his ruling activity. God rules in the hearts of his believers through the power of his Word. He calls people by means of the gospel. By the power of that same gospel he creates saving faith in Christ in people's hearts. With that same power he strengthens and preserves that faith and moves people to produce fruits of faith, works that keep his commandments and express genuine love for God and one's neighbor.

God rules over the whole world and directs the events of men and of nations in the interest of his church, all believers. Sometimes we can clearly see God's hand in the course of the world's history, especially when we can look back over the centuries. At other times that may not be clear to us, but God is always in control, and he will surely keep his promise to make all things work together for the good of those who love him. These are a few basic truths for us to keep in mind as we study Jesus' parables.

First comes the parable of the sower. It is possible that there may have been a sower at work in the background as Jesus spoke. At any rate, the circumstances of the sowing and the growing as described in this parable were familiar to the listeners. The farmer would sow the seed by hand, carrying it in a pouch suspended from his waist, and scattering it as evenly and as accurately as possible with his hands. Some of the seed would fall on the hard ground of a footpath at the edge of the field or running through the middle of the field. Such seed would not have a chance to grow, for it would be in plain sight, and the birds would almost immediately find it and eat it. Some would fall on shallow soil with solid rock beneath. This seed would sprout quickly and do well at first, but that shallow soil was easily dried out by the hot sun, and the tender young plants would wither and die. Some seed would fall among thorns, and it simply would not be able to compete for moisture and sunlight, so it would be choked and never amount to anything. But some of the seed would land in good soil and grow and multiply the seed up to a hundred times by the time it would reach maturity. That's the way it was for the farmer of Jesus' day, and that's the way it is today too. Furthermore, that's the way it is when the good seed of God's Word is scattered among the people of this world.

"He who has ears, let him hear," Jesus exhorted. If you are able to hear, then really listen, take to heart, believe, and obey. When we admonish a child or anyone over whom we have authority to listen to what we say, we have essentially that same process in mind. In that sense, children, listen to your parents; workers, listen to your supervisors; students, listen to your teachers; everybody, listen to God's Word. A little later we will see that this parable is about listening appropriately to the Word of God, but first we hear Jesus explain why he taught in parables so much of the time.

Matthew 13:10–17

¹⁰The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

¹¹He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹²Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. ¹³This is why I speak to them in parables:

**"Though seeing, they do not see;
though hearing, they do not hear or understand.**

¹⁴In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

**" 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.**

**¹⁵For this people's heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.**

**Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.'**

**¹⁶But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears
because they hear. ¹⁷For I tell you the truth, many prophets
and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it,
and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."**

The disciples did not ask Jesus to explain this parable. Instead, they asked him a much more general question: "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" Jesus went on to explain to them that he had two reasons for speaking in parables: to reveal and to conceal. Parables revealed truth to believers but concealed that same truth from certain unbelievers. A parable is easy to remember, so it can help a believer remember or recall the truth that Jesus taught in a particular parable. But, sad to say, there are people in this world from whom God is determined to conceal his truth. He wants all people to come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved, but his patience is not inexhaustible.

When people stubbornly and persistently despise God's Word and insist on going their own way, despite many God-given opportunities to know and do what is right, God finally withdraws his grace from them. They harden their hearts against God's Word, and finally God hardens their hearts by means of that same Word. We cannot judge when an unbeliever's heart is so hardened that God's Word will only harden it more; only God can look into the heart and understand that. So we should be very reluctant to give up and to regard anyone as a hopeless case as far as the kingdom of God is concerned. We must not pronounce such a judgment upon anyone; we must only warn people that this tragedy can happen. The final consequence of spiritual hardening will be that those

people who are consigned to eternal damnation in hell will be without excuse. They will have no one to blame but themselves. They will finally realize this fact, but then it will be impossible to do anything about it. We all need to be careful that we do not fall from the faith and lose our salvation. The solution is, of course, our regular and faithful use of the means of grace, the gospel in Word and sacrament. As we continue to nourish our souls with the gospel, our faith will be strengthened and preserved, and no one will be able to pluck us out of our Savior's hand.

"But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear," Jesus reassured his disciples, and with these same words he reassures us. The Holy Spirit has given us seeing eyes and hearing ears for spiritual truths. As long as we use these gifts, we need not fear for our eternal salvation. But if we despise these gifts and neglect or refuse to use them, God surely has the right to reject and condemn us. Those with special privileges have special responsibility. The disciples were blessed more richly than the prophets and righteous men who lived before the time of Christ. Those people had only promises from God, but they clung to those promises and were saved by their faith in the promised Savior. The disciples saw that Savior with their own eyes and heard him with their own ears, and that was a great advantage to them.

We are even more richly blessed. We have God's complete revelation in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. There we can see Jesus Christ as the Savior who was promised, who came into the world in God's own good time, who completed his mission of atoning for the sins of the world when he died on the cross, and who rose again from the dead on the third day and ascended into heaven 40 days later. Just as surely as he fulfilled all of God's promises about redeeming the world, he will eventually keep his promise to judge the whole world and to take all believers to live with him in heaven, body and soul, forever.

Matthew 13:18–23

¹⁸"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹But since

he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

²²The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. ²³But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means." In this case, Jesus proceeds to explain the parable he has just spoken. "Listen," he says, for that is what the whole parable is about—listening, listening to the Word of God. Some hear but don't really listen. Some hear and listen, but only for a little while. Some hear and listen for a while, but imagine that they need not give their undivided attention to what God is telling them. They are too easily distracted. And some keep on hearing and listening; they grow in faith and in sanctification. They produce the fruits of faith in great abundance. They look forward to and finally experience all the joys of eternal life in heaven.

The seed that falls on the hard ground of the footpath points to those people who go through the motions of hearing the Word of God but almost immediately let the devil take it away from them. The devil calls God a liar, and many believe his lies and go with him to eternal destruction. God wanted to save them and invited them into his kingdom, but they simply declined his gracious invitation. They preferred to live this life according to the ignorance and the evil lusts of their sinful flesh. And God does not drive or drag anyone into his kingdom by force. Christ died for everybody and redeemed the whole world, but those who despise his salvation and reject him rightfully remain in Satan's kingdom for time and for eternity.

The shallow ground describes the person who gladly hears the Word of God and believes it. He is very enthusiastic about being received into God's kingdom and into membership in a Christian congregation. He expects that his Christian faith will exempt him from the troubles that other people experience in this life. He looks for success and prosperity, good health and uninterrupted happiness. (Sad to say, there are some false prophets who lure people into their churches by giving them such false hopes.) But

then reality strikes. The troubles that are an inescapable part of living as sinful people in a sinful world come into this person's life. He even faces some forms of persecution, some hardships that are inflicted upon him because of his Christian faith. He was unprepared for such developments, and he gives up his faith without much of a struggle.

A faith that is small and weak saves a person for heaven just as well as a strong, heroic faith saves. But we must not be satisfied with a weak faith because it can so easily be snuffed out. We rather want to put on the whole armor of God, so that we are fully protected against anything that might threaten to destroy our faith. You might want to refresh your memory on this matter by reading Ephesians 6:10–18.

Thorns represent “the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth.” The seed sown among thorns grows for a while but never really thrives. This kind of listener is still too concerned about material things and the problems of this life. He has great difficulty trusting God to provide for all his bodily needs. He imagines that if he can only accumulate enough money and all the good things that money can buy, then he will be perfectly happy. If he gets rich and still is not happy, he imagines that the solution is to get even richer, and he never has enough. Mammon is his god, and he becomes Mammon's slave, so he never produces fruits of faith to glorify God.

If he fails to get rich, he may still pin his hopes on what money supposedly could accomplish for him. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, and those who have little of it may love money as much as the person who is rolling in wealth. So do not imagine that the seed among the thorns contains no warning for you because you are not, and never expect to be, rich in material things. We live in a materialistic society, and all of us are constantly threatened by “the deceitfulness of wealth.”

Finally we come to the good seed that falls into good soil. Some hear the Word and understand and believe it, and they produce abundant fruits of faith. The most precious fruit is the sharing of God's Word with others. In this way the seed of the Word literally is multiplied 30 or 60 or 100 times or more. God gives us his Word to believe and to share.

So the parable of the sower describes the various ways in which

people who hear God's Word respond to it. We can easily see that it is an accurate description. But what is the benefit of hearing this parable? Is it just to enable us to classify people as hard or shallow or thorny ground? Is it telling us that people are inherently different and that some simply are more receptive to the Word of God when they hear it? No, the Bible makes it very clear that by nature all of us are dead in trespasses and sins, totally incapable of responding at all to God's Word, for it is foolishness to natural man (1 Corinthians 2:14). When people hear the gospel and believe it, that is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit. Saving faith is a gift of God. On the other hand, when some hear the gospel and reject it, that is entirely their own fault. That doesn't sound reasonable or fair to our human minds, but that is what God says, and we leave it at that. Any attempts on our part to logically explain this mystery of “why some are saved and not others” only leads to our denial or rejection of other clear Bible truths. So we simply marvel at the grace of God that saved us when we were as bad as all the rest of sinful humanity, and we look for ways to express our deep gratitude to our gracious God. “Amazing grace ... that saved a wretch like me!”

Another benefit of this parable is to see ourselves all the way through it. By nature we all were like that hard ground, totally unreceptive to the gospel and at the mercy of the devil. Sometimes we are like that shallow ground, and we imagine that we don't need to sink our roots deeply into the soil in order to be able to endure whatever might come into our lives. And we surely are all subject to “the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth.” As we take this whole parable to heart, let us thank God for having brought us to the knowledge of the truth and for having given us unlimited opportunities for growing in faith and godliness through the power of the gospel of Christ.¹

¹ Albrecht, G. J., & Albrecht, M. J. (1996). *Matthew* (pp. 188–197). Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House.