

How to Cultivate Good Soil, Part 2

Luke 8:15

Let's turn our attention now to the implications of verse 15. Which brings us to a second question. What makes good soil needful? What makes it needful? Good soil is needed to bear fruit. Bad soil: hard-packed, impenetrable, rocky and shallow, thorny, distracted by temporal cares, riches, pleasures, bad soil is a picture of an unregenerate heart, one that produces no fruit.

Fruitfulness is eternal life. Fruitlessness is not life. It's not life, it's evidence of sickness and death. No life. No fruit, no life, and that means judgment is looming. An eternity of suffering the wrath of God. Judgment is looming for the fruitless life. So possessing good soil is the issue. Possessing good soil in the heart means avoiding divine judgment on the one hand, and receiving divine blessing on the other. So good soil is needful. It's absolutely essential for producing fruit. Fruitfulness is what God is looking for.

Because the pinnacle of divine revelation came in his beloved Son, and you know what? He expects more. "Long ago," Hebrews 1:1-3, "at many times, in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." Why is that important? Because oh, because the Son is heir of all things, he's the Creator of the world, he is the radiance of God's glory, he's the exact imprint of his nature. He upholds the universe by the word of his power," and after he came in the form of a baby, was born through the Virgin's womb, he grew up and lived as a man, and then he went to the Cross. And it says, "After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."

You know what he's doing there? He's not resting, he's working, he's praying, he's interceding for the saints according to the will of God. To fail to bow down to him, to fail to find joy and rejoice in that King; "*Oh worship the King*" is how we started out this morning, right? To fail to serve him and obey him wholeheartedly and cheerfully, and not bearing any biblically defined fruit, not living for his glory, and all the

while claiming to be saved by his grace, claiming to be washed by his blood, and yet unwilling to really live for him.

To people like that, the writer of the Hebrews gives a warning. "Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?" Stern warning, but a right warning of many today who profess to be Christians. What Paul told Titus is true of them. Titus 1:6, "They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works."

It's a very serious thing to profess to know God and deny him by not bearing fruit, by distorting the truth. It creates sub-Christian forms that do not bear fruit. By professing the truth, but refusing to submit to Christ and obey his lordship, that does not bear fruit. All this false Christianity in our day, like the religion in Israel's day, is a very serious sin before God. In fact, I would tell you that it is more sinful to be religious and produce no fruit, than to be utterly worldly.

Not be taking up a seat in pews in churches. Very serious sin. That kind of false Christianity lies about the power of God in the Gospel, because it professes this vital connection to God's transforming power, but it doesn't possess that connection.

I mean, look at a life that says, I know God, but then lives however it wants to. You see no transformative power in that life. That tells a lie about God. That tells a lie about God's power. True power is found in the transformation of a life from what it was to Christlikeness. That's something that cannot be done by any power on Earth. And I know many stories in this room. I know many stories of other churches I've been a part of, where it is absolutely astounding to see the transforming power of God in the Gospel.

Again, in Hebrews, "The land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it produces a crop useful for those whose sake it's cultivated," that kind of land "receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it's worthless, near to being cursed, and its end to be burned." Passage ends with a warning, which we've heard clearly: good soil is needed, needed

for producing fruit, which avoids judgment, wrath. That provides a first answer to the question; what makes good soil needful?

What about the blessing, though? What about the blessing? This takes us into very pleasant territory. What makes good soil needful? Good soil's needful for producing fruit which brings the blessing of God. Good soil is a picture of a regenerate heart, one that produces fruit, and lots of it. Just as we plant seeds in soil to get a harvest, so we can eat and give thanks to God, so also we share the Word of God with others that they might be converted, that they might repent and believe the Gospel, so we can watch them grow and give glory to God.

Good soil, it's the seedbed for the fruit of the Spirit, which is walking and living in increasing degrees of love, and joy, and peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. That kind of fruit brings joy, that kind of fruit brings contentment, that kind of fruit brings satisfaction in God, no matter what the circumstances. As we learn from the parable of the soils, the Spirit produces this incredible yield of fruit, "a thirtyfold, sixtyfold, hundredfold

yield." Where there's fruit, there's life and where there is life, there's joy, and there's glorifying God.

We ended last time with what Jesus told his disciples in John 15, and Jesus says this, he tells his disciples, "If you abide in me, my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, it'll be done for you." How can he say that and not be worried that you're gonna ask for a Ferrari? Because if you ask, if his words abide in you, you don't care about Ferraris. What you care about is your own sanctification, is holiness. And you care about the holiness of other people.

And so he says, ask if you're, "If my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish." His words are guiding your prayers. God, sanctify me. God be merciful to me in the sin that I'm really struggling with. Help me to grow in holiness. Help me to repent of sin. Help me to walk in righteousness. Oh no, by the way, my brother and my sister, they're struggling too. Will you give us grace that we might be sanctified and bring glory to you? You know how eager he is to answer that prayer, yes? It'll be done for you, he says.

"By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I've loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." See the connection between obedience and love? We obey him because we love him. "These things I've spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be made full," or complete.

Fruitfulness proves our vital connection to the vine. Our relationship to the vinedresser. Fruitfulness means obedience to Christ's commands. Fruitfulness means we are abiding in the love of God and of the Son. Fruitfulness means fullness of joy as we share in that Trinitarian, the love, love that the Father has for the Son, the Son has for the Father, the Spirit has for the Father and the Son, and the living God, by the way, has for us. That's two reasons why good soil is needful, to avoid divine judgment on the one hand, but to receive divine blessing on the other hand.

What keeps good soil fruitful? What keeps it fruitful? The answer is regular self-examination, confession of sin, an unswerving commitment to mortify sin, and an aggressive pursuit of holiness through a life of repentance. If you do that, you're gonna keep your good soil, good, fruitful. You're gonna cultivate a good heart. And before you charge me with preaching legalism, as if I were preaching salvation by works, remember that I've just taught about the need for spiritual regeneration unto saving faith, which is salvation by grace through faith. No, our works do not save us, but Christ's works do. God's works save us.

God initiating everything in us saves us. It's not our initiative that, for God, that counts for anything, because we, on our own, are dead in our trespasses and sins. There's no initiative from a corpse. I've seen a lot of 'em. They don't do anything. What's required is new life. God's initiative brings about new birth. God's initiative changes us. It gives us spiritual eyes to see the truth. It gives us spiritual ears to hear the Word. It gives us a new heart to "hold it fast in an honest and good heart and bear fruit with endurance." That's why Jesus called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." And

then he said to his disciples, "To you it has been given." Why? Because they had ears to hear.

We had some Bible verses to back up the point. Paul commanded us in Philippians 2:12-13, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it's God who works in you to both, to will and to do for his good pleasure." Peter said something similar. 2 Peter 1:10-11, "Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election. For if you practice these qualities," What qualities? If you see 2 Peter 1 verses 5-7, "faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love", "if you practice these qualities, you will never fall, but an entrance into the Eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you."

Those just expand the echoes of what Jesus had already taught. Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven." Or in John 15a, Jesus said, "By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples." Fruit bearing, then,

that's the essential thing. Bearing fruit, not just for a moment, not something that you can point to in the past, but bearing fruit over a lifetime. That is the essential thing. That's the patience, the with endurance, the perseverance, that phrase that ends in Luke 8:15. That is the true mark of genuine discipleship.

So what keeps good soil good and fruitful? How do we make sure we keep on bearing fruit, that we are all more diligent to confirm our calling and election? Let's start with watchfulness and self-examination, and then we'll talk about, quickly, just how to cultivate the soil of your heart. And I want to encourage you not to make this only a personal thing. This is my personal relationship with God. I just, me, myself, and I, take counsel between us, our own, my own personal Trinity. No, open yourself up to your brothers and sisters in Christ. Since we're sometimes, unable to see ourselves for how we really are, it is wise to ask others what they see in our lives, isn't it? In your desire to self-examine, humble yourself and be transparent, and let somebody else, a brother or sister, look into your life, and consider what they have to say.

What are we to watch for? What do we examine? First, if you wanna watch for and guard against the hard-packed pathway soil heart, keep plowing the ground, okay, so that it's, that soil stays soft. And let me tell you, this doesn't mean just listen to more sermons. Examine yourself to make sure you're practicing the truth from the sermons that you're already hearing week after week. In fact, don't just keep adding more, until you know you're actually obeying what you've heard.

Do you understand the Word of God, what it means by what it says? Do you accept the confrontations and also receive the comforts of the text? Do you refuse to, to receive confrontations that come from Scripture? Do you always apply these things to somebody else who needs it? That guy who really needs it over there. That husband of mine, or that wife of mine. Do you really, you know what to do with the truths you read and hear in sermons? You know what to do with it, how to practically apply it? Or does the word bounce off your cold and proud heart?

Do you know how to practice the Word of God for yourself? Because that's what Jesus means, beloved, in verse 15, when he speaks about "clinging to the word and holding fast to it."

"Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart," Hebrews 3:12, "leading you to fall away from the living God." That is, apostatize. So plow the soil of your heart with regular, meditative, repentive, reflection on Scripture, and cultivate a soft and responsive heart.

Second, if you want to watch for and guard against a rocky soil heart, examine yourself to see if you are enduring and persevering in the Word. So, I know it's hard, but turn off your cell phone, and your computer, and your social media accounts, and anything else that has a screen, like a television or anything else that's pumping stuff into your mind. Turn it all off. Anything that distracts you from deep reading of the Word of God. Read Scripture slowly, not quickly. Read it reflectively, meditatively, deeply, not superficially.

And be sure that any emotional responses that come out of you find their source in the Bible's deep theology. Find their source in the text. Make sure your affections are consistent with deep biblical conviction. Because it's only when you go deep that you anchor your faith deeply in biblical truth, building your life upon a rock. When your roots grow deep, then

the grace of God will help you weather any storm, stand firm in any trial, pass any test, you will not wither like a shallowly rooted plant. So as you read, pray over what you read. Ask God to show you anything in your life, your thoughts, your attitudes, your speech, your tone of voice, your priorities, your plans, behaviors, anything that does not align with the revealed Word of God.

Paul said that to the Ephesians. He said, "Look carefully, then, how you walk." Don't just look how you walk. Look carefully at it. Involve others in helping you look carefully at how you are walking, how you're living your life. And don't live "as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of the time because the days are evil. So therefore, don't be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

You say, I can't understand the will of the Lord. It's all hidden from me. Oh no it's not. There is a revealed Word of God that you're responsible to understand, as it says here. "Look carefully how you walk," and see if it measures up to the standard of what's revealed. Are the influences in your life, what you take into your mind, are they promoting that kind of

mindset? Or do you prefer to live superficially, making a lot of jokes about life instead of living godly, sober-minded, mature, Christian, dignified lives?

Third thing: If you wanna watch out for and guard against a thorny soil heart, examine yourself to see whether you are bearing fruit. And I mean true biblical fruit, not just to say, Well, I'm really nice to people. Show me in Scripture where God commands you, Thou shalt be nice. Kindness, gentleness, patience, some of the opposite virtues of the sin of anger, yes. But not just being a nice guy, a nice gal, someone who never ruffles feathers, never rocks the boat. That actually, in certain contexts, can be total sin. Examine yourself to see whether you're bearing biblical fruit. That means you're gonna have to get down in the dirt and dig. Get some dirt underneath your fingernails. Do some spade work. Do a little gardening. And when I see gardening, I mean pulling weeds out of your life.

Walk slowly through the soil of your heart. And this right here is especially a good time to ask a mature Christian friend to help you look at your life, to see what you don't see clearly. Walk through the soil of your heart and pull the weeds.

Find any evidence that you're distracted by temporal things, the cares of life. Are you worried about making a living all the time? Is that occupying all your time and attention? What about the riches of life? Do you like the praise of others? Riches of the praise of others? Do you like stuff? Do you like opportunity? Do you like vacations? Do you like what ambition brings? Are you distracted by that?

Are you distracted by the pleasures of life? Certainly don't have to be rich in our day in order to enjoy and be totally distracted by the pleasures of life. Go through your garden and take the time. Do whatever it takes to pull those weeds. Poison those roots and grow the good fruit of the Spirit of God. As Paul said, "I say, walk by the Spirit, you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

John said, 1 John 5:21, last word in that epistle, "Little children, keep yourself from idols," like the cares of life, the riches of life, the pleasures of life. Make sure you're not cultivating thorns in the soil of your heart, like a cute little idol that you want to hold onto and protect. Like Rachel, remember she hid her household idols underneath her saddle and

she sat on them, because she wanted to hold on to 'em and keep 'em. Beloved, don't sit on the thorns. They hurt. They're not only gonna prick your sensitive flesh, but they're gonna suffocate the fruit that you wanna produce.

That's how we plow the soil of our hearts. That's how we cultivate the soil of our hearts, to make sure that that soil stays rich and loamy, that it's soft and deep and pure, that we may bear much fruit. One commentator noted, after profound reflection on the parable of the soils, he says, "Let us leave the parable with a deep sense of the danger and responsibility of all hearers of the Gospel." It's very healthy sentiment there. We should have a sense of gravity, of what we've heard, especially since three out of the four hearers of truth will not enter into Heaven. These are church people. These are people that may be in our midst, may be sitting next to you right now.

In fact, as this parable teaches, most church people are going to hell. Just as God said of Israel, "With most of them he was not well pleased, but their bodies fell in the wilderness." Most church people are going to Hell. Does that concern you? It concerns me. Take a good look at the man or the woman sitting

next to you, and think about how well you really know that person. I mean, do you really know him? Do you know her? You know her, really. None of us knows what tomorrow may bring, so we've gotta know one another. And as the person sits next to you, he or she is looking at you as well, and asking the same thing about your spiritual condition. So prepare yourself for humble self-examination, because this is a test you do not want to get wrong.

Should be thinking thoughts like this to yourself, Boy, I know I've been sitting in church for years. But am I truly in the Faith? Claim to know whom I believed, I profess Christ as my Savior and Lord. But boy, what evidence really does point to my genuine salvation? What fruit is the Spirit producing in my life? Am I different in Christlikeness than I was a year ago?"

If others ah, come to you asking questions, getting personal, getting in your business, don't be like a typical Coloradan and say, Look, I moved out here for space, and that doesn't mean just geography. It means personally, too. I don't want you around me. I don't wanna ask you, you asking any questions. Don't be like that. Bring people close. Let them ask

questions. Let them get personal, because that's a good sign. That's God's grace, sending you people that care. They love you. And if you love them, you'll ask them the same kinds of questions. These are the conversations you're gonna pursue.

We are Christians. We do not trade in trivial conversation. We talk about spiritual stuff. We talk about sound theology. We talk about edifying doctrine. Why? Because it's our joy. That's our birthright, the need to live out the faith we profess. That's our joy. Nothing is more natural to a Christian, or more necessary for a Christian, than to minister to one another, “provoking one another to love and good works,” cultivating soft and deep and pure hearts. And by God's grace, that's what we're gonna do together. Bow with me. Let's ask God to send his Spirit and help us to cultivate soft hearts, look down deep in our hearts, and cleanse our hearts of all impurity.

Father, we pray with David, “Search me O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. See if there be any grievous way in me.” And in another place, said, “Create in me a clean heart, oh God, and renew a right spirit within me, and lead me in the way of everlasting.” Father, we want to bear fruit. We

want to bear much fruit that comes from that vital connection to Jesus Christ, as we abide in him. We want our fruit to be distinctively, spiritually, biblically defined fruit, wrought by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We want our fruit to bring all glory and honor and praise to you, Father. By your grace, we have followed Jesus' Word, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life would lose it. Whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." So what you command us, oh Father, please give us the power to do, by your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.