

What Is Your Soil Condition?

by Duane Troyer

The sermon explores the parable of the sower, emphasizing the importance of heart condition in receiving God's Word and the necessity of faith in our spiritual journey.

Scripture: Matthew 13:8-22, Mark 4:18, Luke 8:15, John 2:23, John 8:46, 2 Corinthians 5:17, 2 Timothy 2:4, Hebrews 12:1
Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Heart Condition"

Description

Duane Troyer preaches about the importance of having a heart that is receptive to the Word of God, using the parable of the sower to illustrate the different conditions of the heart. He emphasizes the need for understanding, accepting, and keeping the Word in order to bear good fruit for Christ. Troyer warns against being intoxicated by the cares of the world, riches, and pleasures, which can hinder spiritual growth. He highlights the miraculous nature of the seed of God's Word and the importance of having a broken and contrite heart to receive it.

Transcript

Grace be with you, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ Glad to be in the presence of all of you again, beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord. Let's pray:

Oh God in heaven, we thank you, we love you and we praise you. For being our God and Father, we thank you, Lord, and that we can be your sons and daughters through the Lord Jesus Christ and we thank you for the great salvation you have offered us, the price you paid for us. We pray, Lord, that your Spirit would be with us today, that we could be of a sober mind, that we can think clearly, that you can give us ears to hear, hearts to understand. Pray that your will be done here on earth as it is in heaven, for yours is the glory, and the power forever and ever, amen.

As Walter was reading some of this, this morning, one of the questions that Jesus asked there in John 8. He asked the Jews, "Why don't you believe in me?" And I had to ask myself 'why do I believe in Him?' Have you ever asked yourself that question? Why do I believe? I hope within all of us that answer isn't "He makes us feel good" or, "that we grew up this way" "it's what our parents taught us" "it's just the handiest thing we can do" "we like to gather with people like that" But I hope that we've come to a place in our life where we could say with Peter, "where else would we go? You have the words of life." Of course, it takes faith. The bible tells us without faith it is impossible to please Him. So like there's this element of God that we can understand and His teachings that we can understand, and then there's this element that we can't understand, and with faith we receive it, because, where else would we go?

And I think that's what Peter was saying, like this came right after Jesus said this very hard thing. He said to all the people around Him, "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you are not my disciple" and this was an offensive and hard statement. Think about it for a little bit. This was a man who was just mingling among the people there and He was teaching things, and then He says this thing, to the Jews at that, like this is a practice of heathenism to eat man's flesh and drink man's blood. This is something that the Old Testament taught against, and now this man says these things, and many of the disciples were like, "we can't handle this" and they left. And then He looked at the twelve and said, "Are you offended too? Are you going to leave?" and Peter says, "Where would we go? We believe that you have the words of life. There's no other place to go". That right there, that point that

Peter came to right there, is the point where every one of us has got to come to sometime in our life. Where we recognize the Lord Jesus as Lord and King, the one who has the words of life. He's the one person, and the only one person, who can say whatever He says and we say 'amen', whether we understand it or not.

And it's a point we should not come to with any other man. It doesn't matter how godly this man is, it doesn't matter how much people might perceive him as a prophet and a great man, and we need to be careful we never come to that point, that a man can say whatever he wants to say, he can say something and it can be completely contrary to what we understand what scripture says, and we would say, 'aha! because you said it, it must be true'. And yet people do come to that point with other people other than Jesus Christ.

I talked a long time yesterday with a Mormon lady and I tried to persuade her that her acceptance of Joseph Smith as a true prophet is contrary to scripture. And she said the way you figure these things out (this is what all the ones I've talked to say), the way you find out if the book of Mormons is true and if Joseph Smith is a true prophet, is you pray. You ask God to show you whether it is true. And I told her this is a dangerous thing. The bible has already told us that the life of Joseph Smith does not have the fruits of a godly man, of a prophet of God. What Jesus taught, the way Joseph lived is contrary to this, and they would recognize this. And I said for me to pray and ask God to show me this thing, when His word has already declared it, is opening me up for all kinds of deception.

But people do it in all kinds of ways. Countless people have told me that God has led them to do such and such a thing. Sometimes I can't determine. Sometimes I have no scripture against it and it may be true. When a person tells you that God has led them to marry a person whom the bible has already declared that would be adultery, we can see what happens when a person asks God for something which His word has already declared to us. We had better just follow it with faith, whether it's hard or not.

I want to read today about the parable of the sower. It's found in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Maybe we'll go to Luke 8, verse 4. When a large crowd was coming together and those from various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable. A sower went out to sow his seed and as he sowed, some fell by the road and it was trampled under foot and the birds of the air ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky soil and as soon as it grew up, it withered away because it had no moisture. Other seed fell among the thorns and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out. Other seed fell into good soil and grew up and produced a crop a hundred times as great. As He said these things He would call out, "he who as ears let him hear".

His disciple began questioning Him as to what this parable meant, and He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables for that seeing they may not see, and hearing, they may not understand. Now this parable is this. The seed is the word of God. One of the greatest blessings of this parable, Jesus explained it. He doesn't do that with all the parables. Like, He drew all the lines. We don't have to wonder: what was the seed in this parable? What were the thorns and the rocks? He says, Those beside the road are those who have heard, then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved. Those on the rocky soil are those who when they hear, receive the word with joy, and these have no firm root. They believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the seeds in the good soil is those who have heard the word in an honest and good heart and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.

So we know that the seed is the word, and I'm going to go through this and talk a little about each place where these seeds fell. But if you're able, try to imagine looking across the landscape with everything that's there, but consider that the whole earth, the whole soil, is men's hearts, ok? So it says if the hearts of men were laying out here and it was what you saw as you looked across the landscape, and ask yourself as we go through this, where in this does my heart lay? Because this, indeed, is the condition that till determine whether this word of God will be fruitful at all or not. The question is not the seed. The seed is the word and we know it is living, we know it is pure, we know it is the right thing. Neither is it the sower. If the sower is sowing the word, it's not a question whether the sower made some mistake or not. It's not as if he shouldn't have scattered some seed that fell on the wayside or on the rocky soil or something like that.

Back when I was doing more farming, and I still do it a little bit sometimes on our little pasture, I broadcasted a lot of clover seed this time of the year, what you call frost seeding, towards the end of the winter when the ground freezes and thaws, freezes and thaws. And it makes the ground move. These little clover seeds (it doesn't work with all kinds of seeds) are round and kind of heavy and if you just broadcast them over pasture hopefully, and we all know when we do it that not all these seeds are going to make it, they're not all going to make soil contact, but the reason it works to some extent is because this little ball falls down through the grass and the shifting of the soil as it freezes and thaws, kind of opens up, closes, expands, and hopefully this

seed will make good enough soil contact and take root. But as you broadcast these seeds you're making a swipe half as wide as this room if you're doing it with a hand sower. You just sow abundantly, knowing that only a portion of them are really going to end up producing clover.

Jesus may not have been referring to somebody frost-seeding clover, but I expect it was somebody broadcasting seed, not like with a grain drill or something where you made furrows and put the seed right down in the soil, but it was broadcasted, so some of it fell over by the wayside, and some of it fell onto the rocky ground as he tried to get it wherever it might grow.

And also, when He's talking about a road here in this parable, it's probably not the highways we're thinking of, maybe not more than a footpath. Maybe by that time some of these roads would've had some chariots on it, but probably horse and donkey, and foot traffic is about all it was, and so the reason it was even a road, was not because it was graveled or paved, but because it was well-trodden, because people used this path to get from one place to another, and the traveling of it just made a hard, compacted surface. So

when the seed hit it, people trampled over it, it just lay there on the open ground and the birds would come, pluck it up and eat it. It never penetrated. That's what happens with a lot of seed. It falls onto men's hearts who have long tread a common and broad way, or a well-traveled way. "It's the way we've always done things" "It was good enough for my dad and my grandpa and all the other people and they were good men, it gotta be good enough for me", and so this heart that has been packed down and hard by reason of being well-traveled just can't really receive the seed and in a very short time the birds have found out, plucked it up. If on one of these paths people would not travel it and that seed would lay there and the birds would not get it, maybe eventually with a good, hard rain it could produce something, but the multitudes travel the roads and they keep it packed, they keep it trodden, the birds find it and it leaves.

The world over: cultures, traditions, long-held myths, what the multitude thinks is popular, all these things keep seeds from germinating, they keep seeds from breaking through and coming into the hearts of men. They keep the Word from doing that. You know, the multitudes have kept many a person from receiving the Word. Probably most of us who have any amount of preaching on the street have seen this thing happen where a person stops, he has a little bit of interest, enough to actually strike up a good conversation, and his friends come along and drag him off. Or sometimes it's just some terrible distraction and it breaks the conversation. I remember one time, I think it was in Fayetteville, there was this young man I'd see from time to time, and one time he looked extra troubled, just really troubled, and we

started talking. I started asking questions and he started opening up on some things that were troubling him and I pressed him a little harder. It seemed to me he was just about to tell me the thing that really, really was on his heart that made him so sorrowful and troubled, when somebody came along and just distracted the whole thing and this young man turned around and walked up the street. It bothered me so much I tried to go after him and find him, but I lost him. That's the devil doing these things, just like the birds would come and snatch these seeds away before they have a chance, that's the way the devil does with these people. We're not wrestling against flesh and blood out there, we're wrestling against principalities and powers and rulers of darkness and spiritual wickedness.

It is hard, if not impossible, for a person to really receive the word of God if not at some point in his life he does it in the privacy and solitude, by being by himself somewhere, away from the multitudes, whether it be in his prayer closet, somewhere where he can on his own think about this thing, come to the point where he understands this thing and receive it. And that's why it's important that we do have time on our own to think about things and we don't just run off of what other people are telling us, and what the people we're around are saying and doing.

And we need to be careful right here among us. I was telling how it goes out on the street sometimes, how the devil snatches away seeds real quickly, just about when you think you're having a good conversation with somebody in speaking into his life. But when someone amongst us here, speaks a word of truth, and someone else just makes light of it, or we think 'ah, not everyone else is doing it, must not be all that important. We know you're all godly men, you're not doing it, must not be for me.' Like, these are ways that seeds get snatched away.

Right is always right even when nobody does it. And wrong is always wrong, even if the multitudes are doing it.

I had to think of Zacchaeus, he was this short, little fellow that couldn't see Christ. He wanted to see Jesus but he couldn't. It says because of the press, because there were so many people, and if it's an allegory,

we could say he was short in faith, and he couldn't see because of the press, he couldn't see because of the multitudes, and so he had an idea: he got away from the multitudes. He rose above everything and got up in a tree, thinking, maybe I can see it clearly; maybe I can get a better view of it, if I remove myself. And he did! He got such a good view of it the Word came along and asked him to come down and said "I want to come in your house"

Now we'll go to the rocky soil. You know, if you've ever seen in rocky soil, if it's really rocky, there's a little bit of sand, a little bit of soil, but there are so

many rocks. And if there's something growing in it, if you try to pull something out of that soil it usually pulls up pretty easy. It just can't get a firm root. It just can't grounded, and as it says here in this parable, as soon as the sun comes up, it withers because there's just too many hard, hard things in the way for it to spread out those roots and to pull nutrients, to grow, for the roots to spread.

What about in our hearts? These rocks, these sins: lust, bitterness, anger, you could probably go on and on of things that dwell in people's hearts, that though they hear something about the Word and they hear good things about it, and they think it'll be good for them; they want to receive it with joy, but because of these hard things in their heart, as soon as a temptation comes along, they fall for it. As soon as they get persecuted for it, they wither away. People here about the exciting things about christianity, about the blessings, about eternal joy, and they want to receive it, "that's what I want". But they don't count the cost. They may have never spent that moment in solitude considering everything that is involved in it, whether they're willing to follow through with it. When it comes to self-denial...they're happy when they signs and miracles, when they see great things, but when it comes to self-denial, they're no longer interested. There were many people who followed Christ because they could get bread, because they saw signs that nobody had ever seen in their life, but by the time Jesus was agonizing in the garden, nobody was with Him.

That song we sang, says, Crowns quickly won are quickly lost. The man whom God approves still bears the load whate'er the cost, though praise-less it may prove. If a person is only in pursuit of the glorious things that God has promised, he'll probably never receive the glorious things He has promised. Especially if your idea of the glorious things is the things that would be a blessing to me, the eternal rewards, the great things, the miraculous things.

There's a book that I've read and we've read it to our family. I really like it. The title is Princess in Calico, and this girl left kind of a poor home, as far as things were just drab and drudgery, and everybody just had a poor attitude, and she went to some relatives in the city. She was starting to get excited about learning, she'd go to the libraries and she'd learn about music, art; she was learning these things. But she also there in the city she met this woman called Tryphosas, I think, who was an outstanding christian that lay on her sick bed with great pain, but she would rejoice so much, and she taught her some things about true christianity, and this is one of the things I'm going to give a quote that she said that I really like, because the time came that this other girl was called by her father to come back home, because I think the mother was sick or something, or maybe even died, and she was so

disappointed to have to go back to that miserable place, and this Tryphosas told her, "I want to give you a new beatitude. Blessed be drudgery: she is the gray angel of success. And then she said the secret of all culture : Latin, Greek, music, art and travel are the decorations of life. But industry, perseverance, courage in difficulty, cheer under straining burdens, self-control and self-denial are the indispensables. It is our

daily tasks that mainly educate us, and humblest person may live splendidly.

And this girl found this out. She went back to that place and she made an enormous difference to that gray and drudgery life that was being lived there in her family. If we can't learn from our daily tasks, if we can't learn the way of Christ in the every day things that we encounter in life, we probably won't learn it by going on some kind of great venture of some kind. If the thing that allures us to christianity, is the dreams of far away and long ago, great and miraculous things, it's doubtful that we'll ever receive those things or that we'll ever see it.

It'll probably be much like the prophet, I think it is the prophet Isaiah says, about some men who wanted to take Zion and he said it's like a hungry man who dreams he's eating, and when he wakes up, he's still hungry. And a thirsty man dreams he's drinking and he wakes up and he's still weak. It's because Zion is not conquered by dreaming. We don't take the kingdom by just dreaming about it and imagining great thoughts about it. In the Pilgrim's Progress Christian had just left the city of Destruction, and Obstinate and Pliable went running after him to try and bring him back, and Christian said, I can't go back.

I mean, this city of destruction is going under, if you stay there it's going to sink you lower than the grave, and he said, "I'm going to a city that has a eternal glory" and as he spoke these things, Obstinate was like "You're crazy, gone out of your head" and Pliable was like, "Maybe what he says is true, like, maybe we should go with him" and Obstinate went back to the city of destruction and Pliable went with him again. And what Pliable was interested in hearing was "what will be at the end of this journey?"

How soon can we get there? Let's go a little faster!" and not far down the road they both stumbled into the slough of Despond, and Pliable says, "What have you done? If this is what happens in the beginning of the journey, what's going to happen between now and then end? I'm going to let you take that city for yourself, I'm going back!" Crowns quickly won are quickly lost. That's the kind of person where the seed falls on a stony ground, and it rises quickly with joy, but as soon as a hardship comes, it withers away.

Ease and victory are forever incompatible. The seed that fell among the thorns. The soil was good, there was nothing wrong with the soil, but the thorns that come up with it grew faster and it robbed nutrients out of the soil away from the good seed, and it blocked

sunlight that was needed for the good seed to grow. So even though there was a plant there, it says here it did not bring fruit to maturity. You'll notice this in corn fields when corn gets planted up to a woods, when this corn is grown, you'll see this corn nice and tall all nice and even, then as soon as it gets close to the edge of the woods, the plants starting going shorter and shorter and shorter and shorter, till down here at the end by the trees you got a little plant, but there's no ear on it. Its nutrients have been robbed by the trees, by the other vegetation that's growing there. The sunlight's been blocked. There was nothing really wrong with the soil, but these conditions kept it from bearing fruit.

And we don't have to wonder what these thorns are, because Jesus told us what they are: the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and the pursuit of pleasure. I think maybe in the account in Mark it says: but the worries of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires of other things, choked the word and it becomes unfruitful.

Ask yourself this question: If every minute of time that you had was devoted to the service of God, and if every ounce of energy that you had was devoted to the service of God, would you be more fruitful than you are now? Would you be more fruitful for God than you are now? These are the limiting factors. We all

have a limited amount of time and we have a limited amount of energy, ok, and time we have equally, maybe not in length of years, but we all have 24 hours in a day. Energy may not all be distributed equally, but we all have it, and we all probably have more than we use. But these are what we have and these are what we can exchange, like our time and our energy is what we can exchange or use to produce fruit. And the time and energy that we devote to the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and just other things, rob nutrients, they rob away from what could be done for the kingdom of God. There's no reward in heaven for the man that does nothing. There's a reward for the one who had two talents and he gained two more, as well as for the one who had five and gained five more, but there's no reward for the one who buried his talent.

Think about Peter, the apostle Peter, we know he was a very zealous man. There was a point in his life where he said to Jesus, "we have forsaken all, what's for us?" This is the kind of man he was, and we see through Acts how zealous he was, and even Peter in his epistle says, if the righteous scarcely be saved, where will the ungodly and sinner appear? He recognized on what slim terms he stood. We must redeem our time. Here's some things Jesus will never say on the day of judgment, I don't think Jesus will ever say to anyone "you were just too sober and too serious for me. You just took things too serious in life. I wanted you to be a bit more lighthearted" He's never going to say, "You

were too zealous for me", or, "you forsook too much for me" He's never going to say, "you bore too much fruit for me" "You had too many works of righteousness" He's never going to say those things, I just don't think He will. The book of Hebrews says, Lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily beset us, so that we can run this race, and the book of Timothy, Paul says, a man that wars will not entangle himself with the affairs of this world, so that he might please the one he's battling for.

Possible one of the greatest problems of our time, for the most part, our struggle is not in meeting our necessities, our struggle is acquiring too much, more than what's good for us, and how to handle it. Worries, riches and pleasures are like an intoxication, it does something to us, it diverts our minds from being able to think soundly and soberly, and one of the things that happens when somebody gets intoxicated with alcohol, it messes up their balance and their ability to make rational and reasonable decisions.

It messes with something in their brain that they can no longer do these things, and that's exactly what happens to a person who would like to serve God, but he likes to be entertained, he likes to pursue pleasure, he likes to pursue riches, he's intoxicated: he can no longer make sound decisions and keep his balance. He is almost certain to be ensnared. The seed that fell into good soil. You know, unlike what I was talking about earlier when you frost-seed clover, like if you really want to put a seeding in a field, and you want the seeds as much as possible to take root and be fruitful, you dress the field, you break the ground, you plow it, you disk it, you dress it, you break it up and this creates a bed that the majority of the seed, if it is good seed, will sprout and produce something.

And that's what we need: is a broken and contrite heart. A broken heart can receive the word of God and it can be fruitful. There's something I found interesting as I looked at the three accounts of this parable. In the book of Matthew it says: And the one on whom the seed was sown on good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it. In the book of Mark, it says: and those are the ones on whom the seed was sown on the good soil, they hear the word and accept it.

And in Luke it says: but the seed in the good soil are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart and hold fast to it. I think maybe the KJV says, keeps it. OK. So one of them says, he that hears the word and understands it, one of them says, he that hears the word and accepts it, and one of them says he that hears the word and keeps it. I think those are all three so good. Like I think we could say, here's how if falls on good soil, is the one that hears it, and understands it, and accepts it and keeps it.

This is how seed can fall on good soil and be fruitful. There is a notion among people that that's not sufficient. It's not sufficient for somebody to hear the word, to understand it, to accept it and keep it. Like

there's something more supernatural or miraculous needs to happen for somebody to bear fruit for Christ. I don't think it has to. I think if somebody can hear the word and understand it, and accept it, and keep it, it can produce good fruit that the Lord is well pleased with.

In fact, a seed in itself is a miracle. The fact that the word can come into an earthly man, and produce after its own kind, that's a miracle. You know how seed produces after its kind, and when God made man He took dust and earth and He made man in His own image. Man fell, but when an earthly man receives the words of Christ, he becomes in Christ's image. He becomes a new creature, and it's nothing short of a miracle that he can then produce seed after his own kind.

I'm going to read in John 2. I came across this recently and it gave me a lot of food for thought. John 2: 23 This was after he had performed some miracles. Maybe it was right after he had overturned the tables there in the temple. I don't know if you've ever noticed or not, but like in the book of John, this cleansing of the temple happens really early on in Jesus' ministry, then in the other gospels it happens like close to the very end. I tend to think He did it twice, He did something of this sort twice, I guess. This would've been the one early on His ministry and He had started performing several miracles, and in verse 23 it says, Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. Ok, so the people had been observing His sign, but Jesus on His part was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man for He Himself knew what was in man. People were starting to give recognition to Him, people were starting to see these signs that He was doing. People were starting to be impressed with Him. But He knew. He knew and He didn't need anybody to testify what was in the hearts of men. He knew it. And just like that, He knows the condition of our heart, whether it's as hard as the soil by the wayside that's been compacted and trodden and trampled, or whether it's full of rocks and hard spots, He knows these things. He knew that there were people that were following because they were impressed with His signs, they were impressed with His miracles, and that they probably would wither away. He knew that there were people following Him because He broke bread to them and they received bread. He knew they'd probably wither away. There's the rich young ruler, a good description of a man that had too many thorns growing in His life and it choked out the word and it didn't bear fruit. I think I'll leave it at that.

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