

How many of you are aware that farming is hard? The parts I remember most was milking the cows by hand and helping with the garden. The task of putting out a garden began with breaking up the rocky ground with a plow, pulled by Old Shorty, our horse. Then the ground had to be cleared of the worst of the rocks and sometimes a roller or drag was used to smooth the ground. After the ground was prepared, it was seed-planting time, and there were right ways and wrong ways, right times and wrong times, for every crop. Then there were issues of weed control and pest control, along with prayers for enough rain to bring the crops to harvest but not so much that Dry Holler would flood our fields and damage or ruin the crops. The harvest itself was labor-intensive, to say the least. Have I mentioned that farming is hard? I lift my hat to the American farmers, then and now, who have fed us all our lives!

If raising a crop was such hard work, why did we do it? Why plant at all? Truthfully, I don't think we wasted a minute on that question! We all knew that our food supply and sometimes a little cash depended upon a good harvest, and that the harvest could not happen without the seed-planting and all that went along with it.

How many of you are aware that successful spiritual seed-planting is hard? In order for there to be a bountiful spiritual harvest, God, you, or somebody has to prepare the soils of people's hearts. This involves costly love that sacrifices time and resources in order for you to gracefully intersect someone's life. It often means selfless service, because service can open lives to seed-planting. Yesterday, through serving in our Angel Food Ministry, I had the privilege of planting a significant number of gospel seeds. Not only that, but every person who purchased food received printed material about a benefit gospel sing that evening at Remington's, about our upcoming Beth Moore simulcast, as well as the plan of salvation and a suggested prayer. It was a great day for serving and for seed-planting, thanks to our incredible team of essential personnel that gave of themselves to bless others! On the Ridgecrest campus, hundreds of you have taken gospel tracts from the small tubs near the fountains in our gathering area, and I would hope that a significant number of seeds have been planted. However, I also think there are some of us who have learned that it involves hard work!

That brings me back to my earlier question from Dry Holler: Why plant? Why plant spiritual seeds – the good news of who Jesus is, what He accomplished, and how one can receive the benefits of His work?

May I invite you to turn with me to a parable we find in Matthew 13, as well as in Mark 4 and Luke 8? In my bible it is called the Parable of the Soils. Jesus challenged people to examine their hearts, to see what kind of “soil” they are made of. I think, however, that He was also challenging his followers to sow the good seed of the word of God, to plant gospel seed with persistence and passion. Look with me in Matthew 13, beginning with verse 1:

1. On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. 2 And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.

3 Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. 5 Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. 6 But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. 7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. 8 But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9 He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Matthew 13:1-9)

Now drop down to verse 18 and following for the interpretation of the parable:

"Therefore hear the parable of the sower: 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. 20 But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. 22 Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. 23 But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." (Matthew 13:18-23 NKJV)

Let me pause for just a moment and give you a word of guidance concerning interpreting God's word. This passage is sometimes used in debating the question of a person's eternal destination – heaven or hell. Each of the “soils” and the results given are searched to see if they describe one who is truly saved, and some would use these verses to support the idea that a person can be saved and then later lost (see verse 20; cf. Luke 8:13). However, I do not believe this parable was taught by Jesus to give us answers to those questions. I think he taught this parable to answer a spoken or unspoken question: “Jesus, why doesn't your Word always work?” Why does the gospel seem to work in some lives and not in others? Why does God's Word work sometimes in my life, but at other times does not seem to bear fruit? Why are some hearers of God's Word barren in their lives, while in others the Word of God works bountifully? That, dear friends, is a question worth pondering today! Why, over the years of my ministry among you, have I witnessed some who have bloomed and blossomed in their lives and ministry, while others have been guilty of sitting, soaking, and souring? Is the problem with the Word of God? Absolutely not! The issue is not the competence of God's Word; the issue is the condition of our hearts!

With that said, let me return to my question of the day: Why plant? When you read or hear this parable, I think it is a fair question! It is immediately obvious that seed-planting is hard! Look back at the parable and its interpretation. Notice again verse 4, and verse 19. Seed-planting can be such an unprofitable venture! **Many hearts are hardened** to the word of God, and the wicked one is very proficient at snatching the word from hard hearts which lack understanding. **Seed-planting is hard!** Why plant? If much of the seed is wasted on hard-hearted people, why bother? Who likes to be rejected by the skeptic and the cynic? Why waste precious seed? Why plant?

It doesn't get any better in verses 5, 6, 20, and 21! Hear we meet the “fair-weather hearer,” the person who makes a quick and circumstantial commitment to God's word and in whose life the word seems to be working, only to fade in the stretch when the going gets tough! It is seen in the lives of those who followed Jesus because he fed them bread, but when the bread was gone they were so out of there! Sound familiar, anyone? Trouble comes (and it does come); persecution comes (and it will come); and sometimes we stumble in the race! The word of God must be rooted deeply into our lives in order for it to produce the proper fruit. That is why I have encouraged us all, in the 7/24 Challenge (seven days a week I will spend at least 24 minutes each day interacting with God through His word) to “listen slowly,” to

“think deeply,” to “pray fervently,” and to “obey faithfully.” This allows the Word of God to be implanted in our very lives and to explode with power in our character and in our conduct! Why is seed-planting so hard? **Many commitments are casual, depending on our circumstances!** Again, our question: Why plant? “We are 0 for 2, Pastor, on the soil test! Why bother to waste seed when lives are so shallow?”

We have not yet turned the corner. Look now at verses 7 and 22. Doesn't that have a contemporary feel? Here we see people that could be fruitful, but instead they choke! Specifically, they choke on worries (the cares of this world) and wealth (the deceiver of many). By the way, Mark adds these words: *the desires for other things* (Mark 4:19). Are you living there, friend? Is the world with its “worries” and its “wealth” and its “wants” sucking the life of God out of you? **Seed-planting is hard!** People are choked by **worries and wealth and wants!** What an unholy trinity!

“Now I really feel like planting seed, Pastor! If you are trying to motivate me, it hasn't worked! We are 0 for 3, Pastor, and sinking fast!” **Why plant, when hearts are hard** all around me? **Why plant, when commitments are so casual, so circumstantial? Why plant when the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth** and the tyranny of “wants” are going to choke the life out of people? **Why plant?**

We find our answer in two verses and in one word. Listen again to verses 8 and 23. Wow! Those two verses tell us **why we plant!** In one word, we plant seed because of **HOPE!** **Hope** for a bountiful harvest! **Hope** in spite of the hardness of many hearts. **Hope** in spite of many who make casual and circumstantial commitments. **Hope** in spite of the life-sucking enemies of worry, wealth, and “wants.” Even if 3 people out of every 4 fail to bear fruit, even if 39 out of every 40 fail to bear fruit, **we plant in hope!** That one person whose heart is made ready, who hears, understands, and bears much fruit can change his or her world! God's word can work miracles in one life, and that one life can plant more seed, and the harvest can be humongous! **That's why we plant! Hope is the fulcrum that lifts our world! We plant in hope!**

So, how about it? Will you plant, even though it is **hard**? Will you plant in **hope**?

We still have “seed” near our fountains in our gathering area. But that is only one tool. Let’s add a different one today. Find something to write on and write with. I’ll wait. Now, ask God to remind you of someone in one of your circles who is outside the family of God, or someone you know but do not know if they are followers of Christ. One name. A family member. A co-worker. That person who sells you your coffee each day. A fellow student. Get a name! I’ll wait.

Now, make two commitments: First, I will pray for this person this week. Second, I will speak to, call, or electronically contact this person and say, “You matter to God and you matter to me. I have prayed for you this week. Is there anything you would like me to ask God to do in your life or family?”

Is this seed planting? Yes! Will this be **hard**? I think it probably will be - for me, and maybe for many of you. Can I do it with God’s help? Yes! I can be a seed-planter who plants in **hope** of a bountiful harvest!