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Title: Scattering Seeds

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Scripture: [Matthew 13:1-9](#)

Text: [Matthew 13:18-23](#)

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My dad comes from a long line of farming families, spending their days growing corn, soybeans, and the like in northeastern Indiana. Eventually they would make their way to Whiteland, Indiana, just south of Indianapolis. That farming instinct didn't leave them though, as my grandfather and grandmother, until they could no longer

physically do it, maintained a garden in their backyard. In their younger years, I remember great harvests of green beans, onions, the reddest tomatoes you could want, and oh man, corn on the cob that was to die for. And it was always fun for my brothers and me to go out and "work" in the garden with my grandparents. I remember one year when they had readied the soil for planting and they let us spread the seeds. As three young boys are wont to do, instead of being strategic about where we cast the seed, we just excitedly began throwing seeds here and there, tossing them into the air as if they were confetti, and even launching whole handfuls of seeds at each other. That is...until we heard the stern, loud voice of my grandfather state, "Boys! That's enough! We don't scatter seeds like that!"

And he's right. No self-respecting farmer would scatter seed in such an indiscriminate, wasteful matter. As we threw seeds, they landed in the grass, on some concrete pavers around the garden, on the area they set aside to walk through the garden, and some on the actual area where they were supposed to be planted. Especially for farmers that grew up during the Depression, not ensuring that every seed had the greatest possible opportunity to implant and grow was utterly wasteful.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus speaks in little stories called parables, each of which is intended to convey one or multiple meanings using common, everyday circumstances. For instance, Jesus often uses farming as a means of conveying some of the deeper truths of the gospel to those who would listen, and today, for those who would read. At first glance, it may be

difficult to connect with the story's meaning, you know, unless you're a farmer like my grandparents, and so I want to walk us through one of Jesus' most prominent parables. It appears in all three gospels, with a few details changed. Let's look at it together: "That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!" (Matthew 13:1-9)

So what does this parable mean? Well, Jesus did us a favor by providing us the interpretation. "Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty." (Matthew 13:18-23)

Makes sense? Right? Well, maybe. Let's take a look at each segment of the story and see if it's as clear as we might think.

THE SOIL

The most obvious application of this story is for us to imagine that each person is one of the types of soil. It seems quite logical, since that's exactly what Jesus spent most of his time explaining. So, let's imagine a field or garden. The good farmer knows that you need to leave a space where you can walk in order to inspect your plants. Over time, likely this path becomes hardened into a well-worn thoroughfare, where the dirt almost becomes as hard as a sidewalk. Jesus equates this path to the person who is unable to hear and understand the gospel message. For whatever reason, their heart is so hard--maybe from hurts and pains of which no one knows, or maybe they're struggling with a sin that they just can't get rid of--and so the beauty

of the message can't implant in such a hard heart. Eventually, the seed of the gospel message is wiped away again by the pains, hurts, and sin inside.

Within some fields, you have places where the ground hasn't been as attentively cared for, mainly because it appears as if the soil is good. But, underneath that good soil lies rocky places that will prevent deep roots from taking hold. For this type of person, they are at first entranced by the wonderful nature of the gospel message. The forgiveness and grace Christ offers are enticing. But, then, when they realize that having faith comes with expectations and consequences, they fall away because their shallow faith cannot withstand such pressures. Such a person often shows a fire of faith that we love to see, but that fire usually flames out and is gone because they haven't invested in strengthening and deepening it.

Jesus also talked about soil that was infested with weeds. While the seed seems to be set up to bear fruit, eventually what becomes apparent is that the weeds both above and below the surface strangle the new and growing plant. In life, such a person again catches fire and is enamored with their faith. Yet, as time goes on and the temptations of the world around them grow, the draw to live as the world lives becomes too great and the fire again goes out.

Finally, the most obvious is the soil that is ready and able to allow plants to bear fruit. Such a person has a heart of humility, committed to becoming more and more Christ-like, and because of this, they bear fruit. One thing we should note is that each person doesn't bear the same exact fruit. Each of us bears fruit in proportion to the work God has set-out for us.

What every farmer or gardener will tell you is that the soil is one of the most important aspects that determines whether plants will grow and thrive or fail and die. In the same way, the condition of every human heart is the most important aspect of whether the gospel will come alive in us or simply burn white hot and then die out for good. Here's the thing though: I believe we often read this parable and assume that we're one of these types of soil, and it's usually the good one. We also tend to assume we are always only one. But, after years of pastoring and taking my own faith journey, I've come to believe that we vacillate between all four types of soil throughout our lives, and maybe even from one day to the next. The condition of our heart is always and ever changing...our hope and prayer is that it's at least progressing towards becoming fertile soil for Christ's message more and more.

THE SEED

So, what's the seed? Well, that's quite easy. It's the Good News. It's the gospel message that says "God did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all." It's the message encased in the scripture that reads: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal." (John 3:16)

God has provided us a way for our relationship to be made right with Him, and it's through the life Jesus lived, the death that he died on our behalf, and the life that he took up again when he walked out of that tomb.

THE SOWER

Now, we get to the part of the text that I actually believe is most important. On the surface, it would be easy to say that the sower is both Jesus himself as he speaks to the crowds and us as we share our faith with others. And that would be true. But, as is often the case with parables, I think there can be another level of meaning. That level points to the sower as God, always and everywhere patiently waiting for us to respond: "The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

And here's the thing: if we see the "sower" as God, then the very act of scattering seed and where that seed is scattered matters greatly. You see, just like my grandfather and his family would have considered how my brothers and I scattered seed to be extremely wasteful, I believe the original hearers of Jesus' parable would have believed that the sower in this story, by casting seed in places where He knew it couldn't possibly grow, was being wasteful. And yet, that's exactly how God acts. Over and over again, God spreads far and wide the message of the gospel--both in places where it will be received and produce fruit, but, most importantly, even in places where it likely won't. In this parable, the image of God we receive is, yes, one of the wasteful farmer scattering seeds indiscriminately, without concern for where it lands, and that's exactly what makes this story so scandalous.

God, through the work of Jesus, over and over and over again makes available the free gift of love and grace to all who want it, desire it, and He does so without regard for whether it will find a home in our hearts or not. And just like the sower goes out year after year to plant, so God continually offers His love and grace. To me, that's absolutely beautiful.

CONCLUSION -- My Grandparents & Caring for the Field

Over the years, I watched as my grandparents would go out year after year and tend to their garden. Many times, when they would till up new ground for planting, they would have to painstakingly remove stones and other sediment that was lying just below the surface. They would also remove any weeds or other plants that would threaten the livelihood of their crops. But, they knew you had to do this by hand, lest you do it incorrectly and only

multiply the weeds rather than kill them. I also watched as my grandfather would spend hours breaking up the hardest parts of the ground, turning the soil over and over again until it was soft and ready to receive seeds.

As I think back to that and then reread this parable, I can't help but think that God does that too, in our hearts. God can come in and break up the hardest heart to make it ready to receive the true good news of the gospel. God can help heal the pain and hurt you feel that may be keeping you from fully embracing the love and grace and forgiveness He offers. And God can help you resist the temptations of the world that want to choke out and kill any zeal you have for your faith. God can change the soil of any human heart.

And just like my grandparents, if you let God do this, you can produce a crop well above what you'd expect. Because soil that is ready, coupled with seeds that are pure and good, placed by a sower who knows what He's doing can transform any field and make it ripe for a harvest.