

The Four Soils

Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, Luke 8:1-15

PPT Title

The Four Soils

Main Point: We want to have a teachable heart where God’s truth can produce good fruit.

Key Verse: *But still others received the seed that fell on good soil. They are those who hear the message and understand it. They produce a crop 100, 60 or 30 times more than the farmer planted.* - Matthew 13:23

Props: Handful of seeds; large basket of fruits and vegetables

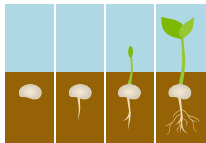
BACKGROUND

Say: People love stories. From the time you were a young child, your parents read stories to you. Stories are passed down from generation to generation. Everyone likes to hear a great story.

Last week we said that Jesus often taught people by telling stories called parables. But Jesus didn’t simply telling stories to entertain or to get people’s attention, **Jesus told parables because He wanted to change lives!**

An old definition of **parable** is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Parables tell a story using something we see every day to help us understand a spiritual truth that we can’t see with our eyes. When Jesus taught in parables, He used things that the people of His day were familiar with. If Jesus were here teaching with parables today, they would be different because our culture is different. There might be fewer stories about farming, and more stories about computers!

The parable we are going to read today is about planting seeds. Most of the people that Jesus was speaking to were farmers. They understood all about seeds and plants because they grew their own fruits and vegetables. Today, not all of us know about planting seeds, since we can go to the grocery store to buy all of our food.



So, let’s look at how a seed grows into a plant. All seeds contain nutrients and energy inside of a hard, protective coating. First the seed is buried in the ground. When the seed is in good, soft, warm soil, it sends out a little root that goes down into the soil. The root starts to drink up the nutrients that are in the soil. This gives the teeny tiny plant more energy. It gets enough energy to start growing, and then a tiny stalk starts to reach up out of the ground. With the sun shining on the stalk, and nutrients going into the root from the rain and soil, more roots grow, and the plant begins to thrive.

FOUR SOILS

Say: Let’s read together, beginning in Matthew 13:1.

That same day Jesus left the house and sat by the Sea of Galilee. Large crowds gathered around Him. So He got into a boat. He sat down in it. All the people stood on the shore. Then He told them many things by using stories.



He said, "A farmer went out to plant his seed. He scattered the seed on the ground. Some fell on a path. Birds came and ate it up. Some seed fell on rocky places, where 1

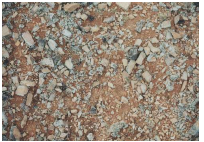
there wasn't much soil. The plants came up quickly, because the soil wasn't deep. When the sun came up, it burned the plants. They dried up because they had no roots. Other seed fell among thorns. The thorns grew up and crowded out the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It produced a crop 100, 60 or 30 times more than what was planted. Those who have ears should listen and understand." - Matthew 13:1-9

Say: This parable/story is more about the ground than the sower. **Teacher:** Have a handful of seeds, and show students how a sower/planter would plant the seed.

Say: A farmer went out to the field to sow seed. He scattered the seed on the ground. Demonstrate this action by scattering seeds on the ground. As he scattered the seed, he noticed that the seed falls on different types of ground.



Some of the seed fell on a **path**. A path is where many people have walked, and the dirt there is well worn. The ground of a path is harder than the ground on either side of it. The more people walk on a path, the more "packed down" the dirt becomes. The seed that fell on the path could not sink down into the dirt. Before the seed could even take root, some birds came and ate the seed.



Some of the seed that he scattered fell onto **rocky places**. **Ask:** Do you see much dirt here? *No*. Do you think that this is a good place for things to grow? *No*. **Say:** It is possible for things to grow on the rocks, but usually, plants don't live long. Plants must have roots down in the soil. But in rocky places, the hard rocks block the roots. Any seed that started to grow in the thin soil soon withered in the intense heat and died.



Other seed fell among **thorns**. The thorns grew up and crowded out the plants. **Ask:** Have any of your parents ever asked you to pull weeds out of your yard or garden? What is the number one rule about pulling weeds? *You must get the roots out!* If you don't pull out the roots, the weeds will grow back. Weeds are very strong and forceful. Wherever there are weeds, they take over the good plants. The strong roots of the weeds use up all the nutrients in the soil, and the plants are left with nothing. These plants barely grow at all; they don't produce fruit or vegetables.



Finally, other seed fell on **good soil**. It produced a crop 100, 60, or 30 times more than what was planted. Farming experts know just what kind of soil is needed for their crops. They will add the right kind of fertilizer (vitamins and nutrients) so their plants can grow. They want their seeds to grow into large, healthy plants that will give them good fruits and vegetables. If it is done right, a handful of seeds will produce bushels full of good things to eat! **Compare your handful of seeds to your basket of fruit /vegetables.**



SPIRITUAL TRUTH (Matthew 13:18-23)

Say: Jesus said that the same seed produced no crop, some crop, or a great crop. **The seed was the same in every place**, but the condition of the soil was different.

This may seem like a strange story for Jesus to tell. But remember, many of the people who were listening to Jesus were farmers. They knew a lot about dirt and soil. Jesus was talking to them using words and word pictures that they could understand. Jesus wasn't teaching them something new about farming. He was using what they *already understood about farming* to teach them *something they didn't know about the kingdom of God*.

This is what Jesus was saying to the people: **The seed that is sown is the gospel - the good news about Jesus.**

The soils are the hearts of the people who make a choice about the message. The condition of a person's heart can be compared to the different kinds of soils that received the seed.

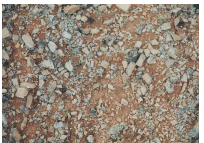
Say: Now we'll look at this story again with the understanding of what each part of the story stands for.

Ask: If the seed stands for the truth of Jesus, the Word of God, and the soil is the hearts of people, what would it mean to scatter the seed on the soil? *Listen for answers.* It is when someone hears the truth through teaching, or reading the Bible.

Say: Let's look at the four different "soils," or hearts:



HARD PATH: Some of the seed fell on a **path**, and the birds came and ate it up. Some people hear the truth, but like hardened paths, they do not let it sink into their hearts (Zechariah 7:12). Soon Satan takes the truth away. (In the Bible, birds are sometimes a picture of Satan.) If people do not receive and respond to the word with faith, their opportunity will be stolen by the evil one.



ROCKY PLACES: Next, some of the seed fell onto **rocky places**. These people hear the message with great joy, but like seeds on rocky soil, they do not let it take root. They seem to be happy to hear about Jesus and His great love, but they do not let it sink into their hearts. On the outside, they may express great enthusiasm, but inwardly, they do not carefully consider it. **There were great crowds who followed Jesus, but only a few were His true disciples.** When these people face pressure or bad circumstances, they quickly forget about God's word. **A true believer follows Jesus no matter what.**

Teacher Note: Some of the "rocky" people may be under the misunderstanding that God will take away all of their problems. Therefore, when problems arrive, they fall away. God's word never promises that life will be easy, without any trials. He promises something far better. He promises that He will be **with us** in our problems. He promises that everything will work together for **our good** - to become godlier and to bring glory to God.



THORNS: Still other seed fell among **thorns**. Some people hear God's Word and start to grow and bear fruit. But soon they become worried about the problems of daily living. They may think if they only had more money and more "things" they would be happy. These wrong beliefs take up all the person's time and energy, just like the weeds steal all the nutrients from the good plants. These people do not focus on living for God, so they don't produce any spiritual fruit. There is nothing wrong with the sower or the seed. The problem is the soil - the person who hears the Word. He must trust God to deliver him from his worries and greed so that he can grow in God's Word.



GOOD SOIL: Still other seed fell on **good soil**. It produced a crop 100, 60, or 30 times more than what was planted. Isn't it great to know that some of the seed fell on good soil? This represents the people who heard God's word and believed it. They put their trust in Jesus. Their hearts received the message of the kingdom, and the seed will take root.



But just like when you plant actual seeds into the ground, the message of the kingdom will grow gradually. We don't plant a seed and see a plant the next day. **True growth takes time.** And sometimes when we plant seeds, we see different kinds of things that actually grow. Some trees produce fruit; some plants produce vegetables. Some produce lots of fruit, and some produce little. Even the soil that produces a small crop is "good."

The same is true in the hearts of believers. There are people who hear the same truth, read the same Bible, grow to the same church, but produce different kinds of fruit. Some are missionaries to other countries. Some are simply sharing God's love with a friend in need. Everyone's fruit will look different, but if each person allows God's truth to grow in their heart, it will be the right kind of fruit. It will be kingdom fruit.

Application: Our county government has an office that tests soil. You can dig up a few handfuls of dirt from your yard and send it to them. They will put it under their microscope and see what it contains. In a few weeks, they will send you a report of

how good your soil is for growing things. You will find out if there are good nutrients in your yard, or if you need to add something to make the soil just right.

That is very helpful for growing actual seeds and plants, but how can you test the soil of your heart? Jesus gives us the answer: We can look at the "fruit" in our lives. Teachable, faith-filled hearts (like good soil) will produce much spiritual fruit. Last week, we talked a little about this fruit. The spiritual fruit that comes from God's Holy Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, forgiveness, healing, righteousness, glory, grace, compassion, knowledge and truth. Another fruit is sharing God's truth with others. So the test for good "heart soil" is checking to see whether there is any of this fruit in your life. If so, you know that God's word has taken root in your heart. You have believed the truth of Jesus, and your beliefs guide your actions. You have trusted Jesus, so His Spirit lives in you.



It is interesting to note that a plant does not "decide" when to bear fruit. It just happens. In the same way, we can't "decide" when we're going to bear spiritual fruit. Fruit comes naturally when we remain connected to the Vine. Jesus said, "I am the Vine. You are the branches. If anyone remains joined to me, and I to him, he will bear a lot of fruit. **You can't do anything without Me.**" (John 15:5) We must stay connected to Jesus, because without Him, we cannot bear any fruit!

We aren't responsible to make the fruit. We are responsible to keep the soil in good condition. Good soil has sunlight, water, and nutrients. How do you think we can "water" and "fertilize" our hearts? *Read God's Word, listen to good teaching, pray, listen to God. (Jesus is the Light!)* Good soil is also free of rocks and weeds. How can we keep rocks and weeds out of the soil of our hearts? *We don't plant things in our heart or mind that are against God - bad TV show, movies, books and video games.*



Now, for the "problem soil." Sadly, there are three kinds of "heart soil" that don't bear any kind of spiritual fruit. These people don't share the truth that is deep down in their hearts. Instead of good fruit, their lives are full of worry, fear, greed, and frustration. They think more about themselves than about the Lord. If this sounds like your life, there is only one way to make a change! Jesus says He is the WAY (John 14:6). Confess: Tell the Lord that your heart has not been good soil. Ask Him to plow up the hard places and replace them with a good, soft heart that will be the perfect place for His truth to take root and grow. Listen to God's promise:

PPT Verse

I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. - Ezekiel 36:26 NLT

Additional Teaching for Older Students: We can also see ourselves as the "sower" in this story. As you begin to share the truth of Jesus with others, you will see these four different reactions. Some people will be good soil. They will accept the truth, it will grow deep roots, and they will bear much fruit. But, sadly, others will be like the four problem soils. God wants everyone to follow Him (2 Peter 3:9), but each person has the free choice of whether to accept the truth. Remember that you are not responsible to make the seed grow! (1 Corinthians 12:3) You are just asked to spread the seed (Acts 22:14-15). It's always right to pray for God to soften the hearts of those you speak to!

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