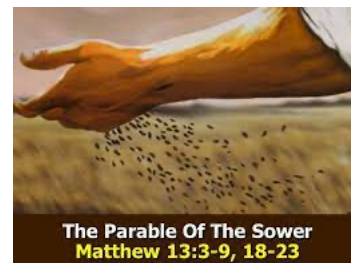


## Using Jesus' "Parable of The Sower" to Examine Our Hearts

By Karen Sue Nyquist



- 1. When sharing God's word with people, Jesus often used parables. Why did Jesus use them?** - "The disciples came to Him and asked, 'Why do you speak to the people in parables?'" (Matthew 13:10 NIV). Jesus' answer can be confusing so let's dissect it. But first, let's look at parables. **What are parables?** - Parables are stories with spiritual meanings, that at first are not obvious, but with serious, prayerful contemplation, and by being led by the Holy Spirit, the meaning can become clear. For this parable, Jesus does tell us the meaning.
- 2. So, how did Jesus answer His disciples' question?** His answer has three parts. "He replied, **1)** 'Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them'" (Matthew 13:11 NIV).
- 3. Let's look at the 1st part of Jesus' answer. What disqualified the others from being able to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, God's word, and spiritual truths?** "This is why I speak to them in parables: 'Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. **For this people's heart has become calloused (*hardened*)**; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes...'" (Matthew 13:13-15a NIV).
- 4. What would happen if people would make their hearts soft, open their eyes to see and their ears to listen?** " ... otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn (*toward God*), and I would heal them'" (Matthew 13:15b NIV).
- 5. But, if Jesus taught using parables, those with hard hearts won't be able to understand, so why didn't Jesus just explain it more clearly to them?** God told Isaiah that by preaching to the people it would, "Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes" (Isaiah 6:10 NIV). This means that by continuing to preach to people who are not ready to receive God's Word, it only makes them harden their hearts more (*duller, less sensitive to truth*), they refuse more adamantly to listen, and shut their eyes even harder.
- 6. Now, let's look at the 2nd part of Jesus' answer. - 2)** "Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them" (Matthew 13:12 NIV). Those who have teachable, soft hearts, probably already know some of God's truth and will learn even more, an "abundance" of truth. Those who have hard hearts, Satan'll come and steal what little truth they may already have. You've seen this before. (*See paragraph 9a below.*) People who are deceived and believe some lies are willing to drop what truths they have, accepting more lies, and can even become radicalized.
- 7. So, if someone's heart is not hard, how will they respond to God's Word?** - The parables are meant to be understood by those who's hearts are tender and are hungry for spiritual truth. Those people are willing to take the time and prayerfully and humbly make the effort to search out the parables' meanings, even searching the Bible for answers.
- 8. What was the 3rd part of Jesus' answer? - 3)** "But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous *men* desired to see what you see, and did not see *it*, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear *it*" (Matthew 13:16-17 NIV). For thousands of years, people had been waiting for the arrival of the Son of God, His Messiah, who was the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, His disciples and others could see Him and His signs and miracles and could hear His teachings of truth.
- 9. Jesus used the "Parable of the Sower" to help us examine our own hearts.** First, Jesus told the parable, then He explained what it meant. Jesus said that a sower sowed seed which fell on various kinds of ground. The ground represents different kinds of hearts. **We have the choice and the responsibility to care for our heart. "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it"** (Proverbs 4:23 NIV).
  - a. The Hard Pathway Ground** - Jesus said, "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom (*the seed, the Word of God*) and does not understand it, the evil one (*Satan*) comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path" (Matthew 13:18-19 NIV). - These people's hearts are hard, like a pathway. Satan is real and is our enemy. When he sees that someone is not understanding the gospel, he steals it quickly, wanting us to live in sin, die, and go to hell, not to heaven. **But we are responsible for making our hearts soft**, just as a gardener hoes the ground, to make it ready to receive seeds and to help them grow. **Ask yourself, "How is my heart? Is it hard?" Am I thirsting for God and His spiritual truth?** If not, then humble yourself, repent, and pray, "God, help me soften my heart." God said, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; **I will remove from you your heart of stone**



**and give you a heart of flesh.** And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (Ezekiel 36:26-27 NIV). With Jesus’ help, you can become one of His followers and understand God’s truth. You can even receive His Holy Spirit.

#### 4 Types of Ground

**b. The Rocky Ground** - Jesus continued, “The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. **When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away**” (Matthew 13:20-21 NIV). When planting a garden, we always remove all the rocks, ensuring that after the seeds germinate, there is room for their roots to grow down deep.

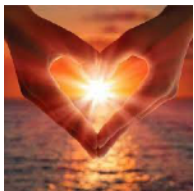
Once someone becomes a follower of Jesus, we have to be determined to remain faithful to Him even when trouble or persecution comes. **Ask yourself, “Am I letting my love for God and His Word grow deeper inside of me. Do I have a deep relationship with Him, or am I keeping it shallow?”** David described his thirst for a deeper relationship with God, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God” (Psalm 42:1 NIV). If you are shallow, you can pray, “God, please help me have a deeper desire and a deeper relationship with You. I don’t want to leave You and Your truth in times of trouble or persecution.”

**c. The Thorny Ground** - Jesus continued with His explanation. “The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, **but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful**” (Matthew 13:22 NIV). A gardener has to frequently pull out the weeds or the weeds will choke the plants, so they remain weak and can’t even produce fruit. Once we become a follower of Jesus, God expects us to grow and to produce fruit. **Ask yourself, “Am I letting worries and problems distract me from God? Or am I so busy trying to pay my bills or even to get wealthy that I don’t have time to pray, worship, or go to church?”** Pray, “God help me focus on You and trust You.”

Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. **He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit**, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful ... “I am the vine; you are the branches. **If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.** If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15: 1-2, 5-8 NIV). If we focus on problems or money, we could eventually leave God and not go to heaven. Make sure your “ground” (heart) has all the “thorns” pulled out so you can have a fruitful, productive life. Jesus spoke of hell, that it is real, and God does not want us to go there. “The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9 NKJV). “God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth...” (1 Timothy 2:3-4 NKJV).

**d. The Good Ground** - Jesus concluded with, “But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown” (Matthew 13:23 NIV). People who understand and follow Jesus, should produce a crop. Some will teach, some will preach, some will help out at church or help people in need, all of us should win souls, etc. Whatever God calls us to do, we should be fruitful. **Ask God, “Do I know what You have called me to do? Am I doing it? Am I being fruitful? What can I do to be even more productive?”**

**11. So, after examining your heart, what kind of heart do you have?** Do you need to change anything in your life? Is Jesus your Lord and Savior? Do you want Him to be? If so you may pray. **Suggested Prayer:** “Jesus, I believe You are the Son of God, You died for my sins, then rose from the dead. I repent of my sins. Thank You for loving me and dying for me. Please, give me a new heart. I confess You as my Lord and Savior and will live for You. Please, help me be fruitful in ways that please God. AMEN!”



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**12. Are you fulfilling God’s call on your life and being fruitful? We can help!** Come visit our church. Here you can learn God’s truths from His Word the Bible. You can be baptized, filled with the Holy Spirit, and serve the Lord, being fruitful!

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