

A Sunday school teacher had been teaching about how God created Adam from the dust of the earth. A little boy in the class—who happened to be the pastor's son—said with alarm, **“You mean I’m made out of dirt?”**

His teacher responded, “Well, in a sense, yes.” He thought for a moment, processing this information through his four-year-old brain, then stated wide-eyed, **“My Mom is NOT going to be happy about that!”**

Today I am going to tell a story about DIRT! None of us like to be reminded that we are made out of dirt. And, yet, you could BETTER understand our lesson for today IF I TELL YOU JUST THAT—**YOU AND I ARE MADE OUT OF DIRT.** But before you get offended, give me the opportunity to explain.

Jesus was a keen observer of the world around him. His observations resulted in many of the parables that he told. That is certainly true in today's parable. It is a simple parable yet it appears in all three synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—which suggests that it is something to which we ought to pay attention. Listen to Jesus' words:

“A farmer went forth to sow. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still, other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

Imagine a farmer in those days planting seed. He wouldn't have had sophisticated technology like some farmers have today. Did you know that John Deere now offers an air-conditioned tractor equipped with a GPS guidance system? Boy, wouldn't farmers in days gone by want to have one of those? Have you read that this year self-driving tractors are supposed to hit the market? None of these, of course, were available when Jesus walked the earth.

Sowing seed was done by hand. Imagine Johnny Appleseed with a sack of apple seeds slung over his shoulder **SPREADING HIS SEED** by flinging the seed with a wild hand.

By the way, there really was a Johnny Appleseed and, yes, he did have a passion for planting apple trees. **We're told he also had a passion for spreading another kind of seed.** Every once in a while, he would take a break from sowing apple seeds and he would sit under the shade of one of his trees and *invite passersby to join him while he read passages from the Bible and other books.*

But imagine how useless the farmer was that Jesus is talking about today. His method of planting sowing seeds was wasteful. **The seed was going everywhere.** Some of the seed was **landing on a hardened path** where it could not possibly grow and some of the seed was **falling on a patch of rocky soil.** Some of it **fell into weeds and thorns where the emerging plants were choked out** and only a relatively **small number of seeds fell on good soil.** This farmer was so slipshod in his work that we can only conclude that **this parable isn't about farming at all. It is really about God—and the seed which was sown is His GRACE.**

God is not so much efficient with His GRACE as He is GENEROUS. He scatters it all over the place. And the soil on which the seed is sown? **THAT IS US!!!** In fact, it's everyone in this world. So, in a sense, **WE ARE ALL DIRT.** *But not all dirt is the same.* God's grace is available to everyone, **but not everyone responds in the same way to God's gracious GIFT.** And because God gives us the freedom to decide our destiny for ourselves and will not force Himself into our lives, *God's GRACE works differently in different people's lives.* **I believe that is what this parable is about.**

It is interesting that this is one of the very few parables that Jesus bothers to explain. Again, that signifies that this is an important teaching. **In this parable Jesus describes (4) kinds of soil. And again, Jesus isn't really interested in teaching us about growing crops; he's describing (4) KINDS OF PEOPLE.**

#1: First of all, there is the UNBELIEVER - the agnostic or even the atheist. “Listen then,” said Jesus, “to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.”

Imagine for just a moment a path through a field or a forest. Perhaps hundreds or even thousands of people walk on that path over a period of time. The path becomes hardened and bare of vegetation. That's what makes it a path. Soon the soil is beaten down. In the dry season, it becomes as hard as rock. In a rainy season more water washes off of it than is absorbed.

Hungry birds come along and gulp down any seeds that do not get washed away by the rain. **Any seed that falls on the path has little chance of taking root.**

Jesus said the seed that falls on the path is like people who hear the Gospel but do not understand it. I believe he means more than “do not understand it.” I believe it’s more that they don’t accept it, they don’t take it into their hearts. They hear the Gospel, but do not make it their own.

Did you know that Psychic Services is a booming business today? Yes, psychic readings and other affiliated services—such as reading palms or tarot cards or tea leaves or whatever—generate a revenue stream worth over \$2 billion annually in this country? According to this report, atheists and agnostics are the core consumers of psychic readings. *Fortune* magazine says many of their top customers are top tier executives, particularly in the tech industry. **Which proves the validity of the observation that *when people quit believing in God, they don’t believe in nothing; instead they will believe in almost anything.***

That’s the seed that falls along the path—the hard-core non-believers. And again, they are a growing group.

#2: Then Jesus moves to another group. Let’s call this the MORNING-GLORY GROUP --this is the seed that falls on rocky ground.

“The seed falling on rocky ground,” says Jesus, **“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.”

Rocky soil is not quite as treacherous for planting seeds as the hardened path. Plants might at least grow initially in rocky soil. But the prospects are dim, because the soil is so rocky that the seed doesn’t get the nutrition it needs. Without the proper nutrition nothing grows like it ought to grow. I am calling this the morning-glory group because of something I read about professional baseball players.

In professional baseball, coaches talk about the “morning-glory” syndrome. Morning-glories are called morning-glories because they unfold into full bloom in the early morning. Then they start to fade. So, this name, morning-glory, is given to young recruits in professional baseball who perform marvelously in spring practice in Florida or Arizona but then as they travel north and experience the lengthy baseball season, they begin to wilt like a morning-glory flower. By June their batting average drops to an unacceptable level. And by July the Team releases them.

A SEED that falls on rocky soil is like that. *It may take root initially but because it doesn’t get the nutrition it needs it eventually wilts and dies.* Morning-glory is a name that could be applied to many Christian believers who make an initial commitment to Christ but then fall away. A few will be sincere, but when they get out in the world, they waver, then wither. Only a handful experience the joy, the new meaning and purpose that only Christ can give.

#3: But there is a third group. Let’s call this group, “THE DISTRACTED.”

The third group, says Jesus, consists of ***the seed that falls “among the thorns.”*** Here he is talking of someone **“who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, make it unfruitful.”**

It’s inevitable that no matter how careful the sower is, some of the seeds will fall into an area infested with weeds and thorns. These pests often grow much faster than the good seed and, because they are so strong, they throttle the life out of the good seed.

I call these “distractions” because that’s what worldly worries do to us. They keep us from focusing on Christ and his will for our lives. We talk nowadays about distracted driving, but what about distracted living where we focus on nearly everything except Christ and his will for our lives? **In the last few months, WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR DISTRACTIONS??** Many of our normal routines have changed, our ability to separate work from home has become impossible, and our inability to spend time with those we love has taken its toll on all of us. Because of these things and more, our ability to live a Christ like life has become very difficult.

We’re told that General George Washington faced immense hurdles when trying to build an army to face powerful British forces. One of the most perplexing challenges he faced was maintaining troop strength. His biggest foe was distraction. Most of Washington’s soldiers were farmers. When times for planting and harvest rolled around, these fighters’ hearts and minds turned homeward. They wondered who would sow the seed and gather the crops that enabled their families to

survive. In such seasons, Washington and his generals faced a huge drain on the army's strength as troops whose attention was pulled from the battlefield to the harvest field laid down their weapons and walked home. **That is the seed that is sown where there are weeds and thorns.**

Three groups—UNBELIEVERS, the MORNING-GLORIES, those who are DISTRACTED... Jesus knew that many of those who listened to his teachings would fall away or, at least, would give only minimal service to his kingdom. **Remember the Pareto Principle?** It says that in every group, 20% will do 80% of the work. It's certainly true in the church.

Fortunately, there is one more group that Jesus describes. This is the seed that falls on good soil.

#4: Let's call this soil the "COMPANY OF THE COMMITTED." Jesus says the good soil *refers "to someone who hears the word and understands it.* This is the one," he says, *"who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."*

The COMPANY OF THE COMMITTED refers to people that Christ can always count on. And notice what Jesus says about these folks: *they produce a crop "yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."*

I believe that Jesus is saying to us that when we give Christ our best service our work is magnified more than we ever dream possible. Our influence on our family, our community, even our world is greater than we can POSSIBLY IMAGINE.

Years ago, author Dale Bourke writes about a conference she attended. A friend named Bruce offered her a ride to the airport. As they were about to leave, the doorman from the hotel stopped them and said that the hotel bus had broken down. Would they mind taking another passenger to the airport? They agreed, and the man who would be riding with them gratefully jumped in. Bruce asked the man where he worked. The man mentioned a certain Christian publishing house. Bruce perked up and said, "I have really fond memories of that group, because I attended a weekend retreat one time while in college, and that's where I became a Christian. Bruce went on to explain that a year later when he gave his testimony, his entire family came to Christ. His sister eventually became a missionary and translated Scripture for a group in Africa. His parents turned their publishing interests to Christian books and published some of the biggest Christian books of the next few decades. Bruce had become the owner of a major Christian publishing house himself and brought many significant Christian books to the public. **It was obvious that the impact of that retreat had echoed throughout the world. Their passenger, the man who was with the organization that sponsored that retreat, grew strangely silent.** Then he said quietly, "I led that retreat. It was my first time as a conference leader, and I felt like a total failure. UNTIL THIS MOMENT... I have always believed it was one of the biggest failures of my life." **By the time we reached the airport," they all had tears in our eyes.**

You never know how God will lead you to sow a small seed into someone's heart—and what kind of harvest will be reaped. But if you are willing to sow a seed—the seed will multiply through the people you touch.

SO, I ASK YOU....On what PATH do you find yourself TODAY? What kind of DIRT do you think of yourself to be?

I doubt that any of us is the hardened DIRT, the NONBELIEVER. We wouldn't be in worship today if we were, and that's good. A few of us, however, may be among **the morning-glory group.** At one time we were excited about our faith, but as the years have passed, we have faded in our PASSION for Christ. Deep in our heart we miss the feeling that we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

Many more of us could be among the DISTRACTED. We're all so busy today. Who has time for God? And yet, living in the most prosperous and secure society in the world—many of us are desperately lonely . . . and uncertain about life . . . Something's missing in our life and deep in our heart we know what it is. **It is a living relationship with God through Jesus Christ. So this day many of us will want to pray that Christ will help us be the GOOD DIRT**--where the harvest is increased thirty, fifty, or even a hundred fold.

GOOD DIRT that will help our life have purpose and peace.

And in return, as GOOD DIRT we will enrich THOSE around us so that MORE will encounter Christ.

Amen.