

THE FAMILY GARDEN

Soil

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/the-family-garden-soil/>

In this sermon series, we are exploring agricultural images related to our faith in Christ and applying them to our families, not just to ourselves. Today, we think about soil, earth, dirt (you can tell someone tomorrow your pastor preached a dirty sermon!). Wendell Berry writes, “The soil is the great connector of lives, the source and destination of all. It is the healer and restorer and resurrector, by which disease passes into health, age into youth, death into life.” Here’s another quote: “Essentially, all life depends upon the soil ... There can be no life without soil and no soil without life,” Charles E. Kellogg, *USDA Yearbook of Agriculture, 1938*. And finally, this: “Land, then, is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals,” Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac, 1949*.

The parable which Jesus tells here in Matthew 13 has been called the parable of the seeds, but it’s really a parable of the soils. The seed (God’s Word) is a constant; the variable is the soil. Let’s take a look at the various soils described by Jesus. Soil one (vv. 4, 19)—packed, hard soil. Soil two (vv. 5, 20)—rocky soil (no roots...remember last Sunday’s sermon? Of course you do!). Soil three (vv. 7, 22)—depleted soil, all the nutrition sucked from the soil by weeds. Soil four (vv. 8, 23)—good soil, yielding a bumper crop. This is how we enter faith, a relationship with Christ—his Word comes to be planted in us (James 1:21).

But the soil has to be right. When we first moved to this part of the state. I was shocked at nature of the soil. I was accustomed to good, rich, loamy, black dirt from our farming days. I remember one day, after we moved into our house here, I was trying to plant a shrub and kept running into rocks. I had to borrow a pick ax from my dad! I learned that day what Jesus was saying. Not all soils are created equal.

I once heard about a gardener answering a question about his success. People were asking him about this and that kind of rose. His simple advice: Go buy a \$20 rose bush, but be sure to put it in a hole filled with \$50 dirt! It’s the soil!

Now let’s take this parable of Jesus and apply it to our families and to our church’s passion to touch families. Your heart is God’s seed bed. Your home is God’s seed bed. How’s the soil? Lisa Miller has written a book, *The Spiritual Child: The New Science on Parenting for Health and Lifelong Thriving*. The author teaches psychology and education at Columbia University’s Teaching College in NYC. She argues that a child’s spiritual development is closely tied to intellectual, physical and social/emotional development. “Biologically, we are hardwired for spiritual connection,” she writes. A seed bed!

Now, also remember that in the early Church, Matthew’s Gospel was used as a new members’ manual, a teaching document to introduce people to faith and to instruct them in it. Go back and

read the rollout document of Setting Sail from Feb. 26 and note how much centered around lifechanging faith, allowing the seed of God's Word to enter deeply into our collective lives.

Consider this: Perhaps Jesus isn't talking about four different kinds of people. That's the safe way to interpret it! Maybe he is talking about four different ways one heart can be, sometimes within the same week or day! And here's a tip. Jesus' parable begins and ends with the command to listen (vv. 3, 9). And the word "hear" or "hears" appears five times in vv. 18-23

Here's what I know. The hard, rocky soil of my heart which makes it hard for me to hear God also makes it hard for me to hear my wife. Bad soil impacts our walk with God and the health of our family. The harshness with which you speak to your spouse, children or parents may be a reflection of the acidity of your heart's soil.

Do you know where the word humility comes from? From the word humus, the dark, organic matter in soil. To be humble is to be lowly, close to the ground, literally, down to earth! Humility—brokenness and listening (James 1:21). God's Word never takes root unless and until we repent. Until the soil of our heart is broken up. "Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you" (Hosea 10:12).