

# Further up, Further in

## Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT  
MOUNTAIN  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH

### “THE PARABLE OF THE FOUR SOILS”

For individual study or group discussion

Also known as the *Parable of the Sower*, today’s passage in Luke 8 is meant to be a key to understanding the other parables in Scripture. It is the “meta-parable”, or the parable which explains why Jesus taught in parables. In verses 11-15, Jesus interprets for those in his inner circle, using the *Parable of the Four Soils* to prepare and enable his true followers (those who have “ears to hear”) to understand the hard road that lies before them as they sow God’s word throughout the world. (cf. Mark 16:15 and Matthew 28:19-20)

At the opening of Luke chapter 8, we see Jesus moving from town to town preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God. Gathered around him are crowds, some of whom experienced his healing. We are told his disciples and a handful of faithful, charitable women accompany Jesus.

- Based on your reading of today’s passage, what types of listeners would have been in the assembly which gathered to hear Jesus?
- What cultural reference points would the original audience have understood that we might miss today?

It would be a mistake to assume the purpose of a parable is to make plain some troublesome point of doctrine in Jesus’ teaching. According to Christ, parables were given not only to reveal truth, but to conceal it as well, “lest they should turn and be forgiven” (v. 10; Isaiah 6:9-10).

- When Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 to his disciples, what is his purpose? And how does this hard saying relate to Romans 9:18? (cf. John 12:37-43)
- The parables are about the Kingdom of God arriving in Jesus. They are first and foremost about Jesus and what he is doing. How is Jesus equipping his followers for future kingdom work with this parable? (cf. Mark 16:15-16)

In verses 11-15, Jesus gives a lesson in pedology (the study of soils), where he classifies for us four types of soil, comparing them to four heart types: the hard, unreceptive heart; the shallow, superficial heart; the strangled heart; and the receptive heart. Additionally, understanding the analogy of the “seed” (vv. 5a, 11) as the Word of God helps the reader to understand that when we reject God’s Word, we reject Jesus (John 1:1).

- Read Luke 8:5, 12 and Mark 4:4, 15. What happened to the seed sown along the path? What do the birds represent?
- Read 2 Corinthians 4:3-4. How does Satan prevent unbelievers from “seeing the light of the gospel”?
- Read Luke 8:6, 13 and Mark 4:5-6, 16-17. What happened to the seed sown on the rock? What does the sun represent?
- Read Luke 8:7, 14 and Mark 4:7, 18-19. What happened to the seed sown among the thorns? What do the thorns represent? How does the “thorny ground” relate to the visible church?

Pastor and theologian J.C. Ryle correlates the “thorny ground” to regular church attenders who weekly sit under the preaching of God’s Word. They are those who, “listen to a sermon and approve of every word it contains, and yet get no good from it” because “your heart, like the ‘thorny ground’, may be choked with a rank crop of cares, pleasures, and worldly plans; you may really like the Gospel, and wish to obey it, and yet allow other things to occupy your affections and to fill up your mind. Alas, there are many such hearers! They know the truth well. They hope one day to be decided Christians; but they never come to the point of giving up all for Christ’s sake. They never ‘seek first the kingdom of God,’—and so die in their sins.”<sup>1</sup>

- What distinguishes the receptiveness of a person when the seed sown on good soil sprouts and flourishes? How do they bear fruit? (v. 15, Mark 4:20)
- Read John 14:26, John 16:7, and 1 John 2:27. What gift of God can empower a follower of Christ to understand his Word?

DATE: May 1, 2022

SPEAKER: Aaron/Frank

SERIES: Gospel of Luke

PASSAGE: Luke 8:1-15

## Family Dinner Table

Within our study of the *Parable of the Four Soils*, it’s hard for non-agrarian modernists like ourselves to fully grasp the depth and complexities of a metaphor comparing soil with the human heart. Not so for Dr. Norman Wirzba whose research has centered on a recovery of the doctrine of creation and humanity’s relationship with it. Wirzba is a professor and author who has thought a lot about soil from both a gardener’s and a Christian’s perspective, as his studies and teaching interests intersect both ecology and theology. In a 2019 article entitled *The Ground for Hospitality*, Wirzba unearths for his readers many lessons to learn from the soil. One of those lessons is a deeper understanding of what it means to be “hospitable”: *Agrarians believe that few tasks are more fundamental than for people to become hospitable to the soil that is hospitable to them. The work of making room for others, noting their need and potential, and committing to care for them, is the indispensable work. It is here, in the giving and receiving of nurture, that we learn the meaning and the point of life. If you want to experience life’s abundance and potential joy, give yourself away. This is what the gospel teaches. It is what God has been doing since the beginning. It is what the soil witnesses to every day.*<sup>2</sup>

- As a family, plant and tend a garden this summer in order deepen your understanding of the Scriptures’ use of metaphors for soil, seeds, land, and water.

### PRAY FOR HOME MISSIONS

Bridges Community Church,  
Alhambra, CA

### PRAY FOR WORLD MISSIONS

Boureima, supported national partner,  
is serving in a sensitive region in Africa  
through a network of ministries that are  
making disciples and planting churches.

<sup>1</sup>Ryle, J.C. *The Sower and the Ground*. Expository Tracts, No. 5. [http://www.tracts.ukgo.com/ryle\\_sower\\_and\\_ground.pdf](http://www.tracts.ukgo.com/ryle_sower_and_ground.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>Wirzba, Norman. *The Ground of Hospitality*. Plough, 8 Apr. 2018, <https://www.plough.com/en/topics/faith/witness/the-ground-of-hospitality>.