

Hitting Paydirt

By

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“Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop- a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear.” Matthew 13:8-9

Anyone who has been on The Journey would understand that becoming a disciple of Christ and entering into an intimate, abiding relationship with Him is a process. Someone said, “You can’t microwave Disciples!” It’s true. As Jesus taught His disciples, so often He would use nature to illustrate key Kingdom principles. We use Bruce Wilkinson’s profound little book, “Secrets of the Vine”, to guide our men into Jesus’ teaching on the abiding relationship through the object lesson of a grapevine and its branches. We are asked to ponder in which ways the Heavenly Gardener is pruning our branch to make it more fruitful.

This analogy, which helps us see the pathway toward the life God wants for us, is reminiscent of another teaching of Jesus, The Parable of The Sower. In this teaching, Jesus keys in on the soil which will receive His Word and His Good News. The soil to which He is referring is our hearts. He talks about 4 different conditions of our hearts which determine the fertility of His Word. One of the accounts of the parable is found in Matthew 13:1-23. He tells the parable to a large crowd, but later, in verse 11, He tells His disciples “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.” Yes, for Jesus’ disciples, He reveals “secrets” to the Kingdom that not everyone will be afforded.

He teaches them that some will receive the Word, but their hearts, like a stone pathway, will not receive it. Some will receive it with joy, but because their heart is shallow, at the first sign of trouble, the seed will work its way to the surface. Some hearts receive the Word, but their garden is overrun with thorns in the form of materialism and worldliness, preventing the seed from bearing fruit. Lastly, He talks about good soil which receives the seed and bears a good bountiful crop. As you think about these 4 different conditions, you probably recognize each one. However, in this teaching, unlike the one about the Vine and the branches, Jesus does not talk about how to get to that good soil.

The other day, while “self-feeding” in the Old Testament, some words struck my heart which, for me, answered this question and drew a connection to this parable. In Isaiah

28:24, it says, *“When a farmer plows for planting, does he plow continually? Does he keep on breaking up and harrowing the soil?”* There it was...another “P” word to go with “Pruning”. This word was “Plowing”. All of the sudden it made sense to me. God has to plow the soil of our heart until it can become good soil. I pictured Him with a hoe in his hand, hacking away at my heart, pulling out the rocks and the impurities and especially the thorns, working that soil back and forth. This is a process that has taken years, and it still goes on.

In the initial phase of spiritual development, we ask Christ into our garden. This is where he removes the heart of stone and gives us a new heart of soil, ready to receive His Spirit (Ezekiel 36:26-27). Then, the Spirit begins His gardening. First thing to go are those rocks at the surface. These are easily seen. These are the obvious, repetitive habits and sins and lifestyles. As we let Him into our garden, He lifts the hoe and goes to work. As He digs deeper into our hearts, He gets to the root of many of our problems. He finds generational sin, secret sins, core issues that could choke out His seed. Sooner or later, He will tackle those difficult thorns. He must strip away our dependence on the things of this world, namely money. These thorns hang on for dear life as the Spirit pulls at them. They are sharp, deep-rooted and nasty. If they don't go peacefully, He may have to use a Storm with torrential rainfall to loosen up the soil to help them let go.

I can look at my own spiritual progression, and I can see how the loving Gardener has been at work. I can see where He has been working hard to get rid of those thorns. I can see how the financial difficulties I, and many men around me, have experienced have been used like a sharp Hoe to turn up some good, rich soil. The good news is that there comes a time when the Gardener puts down the Hoe. There is a time when the soil is ready for the seed. There is a season of germination and rest as the seeds fall deep into our hearts. Then, there is the coming season of Harvest.

God has a plan for you, and it is good. If you have been going through some difficult times, take heart. The Spiritual Gardener is doing His work on the soil of your heart, plowing and preparing for the good seed to be received by you. He loves you, and He wants to reveal many secrets of the Kingdom to you. He wants to multiply you 100 times over into the lives of those around you.

“Sow righteousness for yourselves, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until He comes and showers His righteousness on you.” Hosea 10:12