



GOOD SOIL FOR GOOD SEED

LESSON 2 // AVOIDING SPIRITUAL BURNOUT

Perhaps you or someone you know has been the victim of physical, emotional or spiritual “burnout.” Sustained or prolonged stress can cause burnout in our lives if we are not aware of it and learning how to avoid or manage it.

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus addresses the condition and cause of spiritual burnout. He helps us to see that spiritual burnout is related to the spiritual condition of our hearts.

Mark 4:5-6, 16-17 describe the second condition of the heart in this parable—the kind of “soil” that can produce spiritual burnout:

Mark 4:3, 5-6, 16-17 (NIV) Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. ... ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ... ¹⁶ Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. ¹⁷ 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.

Jesus speaks of “rocky places” where the seed lands. Certainly this is not the kind of soil that produces good fruit! How can we avoid this heart condition and the spiritual burnout it brings?

1. Understand the problem of rocky places.

A shallow layer of soil covering sub-surface rock is the picture we see in Mark 4:5-6. When the seed falls into this soil, it springs up quickly, but withers when the sun comes up because it has no root. Notice Jesus’ description of a person with this kind of heart condition:

- They “hear the word.” God’s truth finds a point of entrance into their soul and spirit.
- They “at once receive it with joy.” “At once” speaks of an eagerness to believe, but could also imply a lack of thoughtfulness about what faith in God’s Word will mean.
- They “last only a short time.” Luke 8:13 says they “believe for a while.” At some point “the meter runs out” and their faith expires.

The external cause of this expiration is testing, trouble and persecution that arise because of God’s Word. This is the sun that scorches the plant. But there is an internal cause as well: sub-surface rock that will not allow the development, watering and nourishment of roots.

This is the real problem that must be addressed. These sub-surface spiritual rocks include: fear; inadequate or inaccurate concepts of God; an underdeveloped relationship with God; undeveloped character; false concepts about the Christian life; stubbornness and an unwillingness to surrender to God; a temporal value system; pain and anger.

2. Get rid of the rocks.

If we are going to establish good roots, we must get rid of the rocks! Only this will enable our hearts to be good soil that receives and responds to the Word and produces abundant fruit. How can we do this?

- Surrender to God.

Luke 9:23-24 (NIV) Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.”

- Be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 5:18 (NLT) Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT) But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control.

- Discipline your character.

1 Timothy 4:7b-8 (NIV) Train yourself to be godly. ⁸ For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

- Renew your mind.

Romans 12:2 (NIV) Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

- Get serious about forgiveness.

Ephesians 4:32 (NIV) Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Spiritual burnout is avoidable! The key to this is good soil, free of rocks, that allows plants to put down healthy roots and produce lasting fruit that does not wither in the hard times.

Discussion questions

1. In Mark 4:3, 5-6, 16-17, what are the external and internal causes for the withering and “burnout” of the plant? How does this relate to spiritual burnout in our lives?
2. Read Luke 9:23-24. How do these verses challenge and encourage you about fully surrendering to the Lord?
3. Read 1 Timothy 4:7b-8. Why is it so important to “train yourself to be godly”—to discipline your character—if you’re going to avoid spiritual burnout?