



## GOOD SOIL FOR GOOD SEED

### LESSON 3 // SUFFOCATING SAINTS

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus warns us as His followers about some problems of the heart that seriously affect our spiritual development. Three of the four “soils” He describes do not provide a good environment for the seed of God’s Word to flourish.

In Mark 4:18-19 and Luke 8:14, Jesus specifically addresses one of these soils:

**Mark 4:18-19 (NIV)** *Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; <sup>19</sup> but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.*

**Luke 8:14 (NIV)** *The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.*

Let’s look at the condition of this soil, the spiritual problem it represents, and how we can recognize and avoid this problem in our hearts.

#### 1. The condition of the soil

Four things are noteworthy about this soil: it received the good seed; it contained other, undesirable seed; both the good and undesirable seed grew simultaneously; the undesirable seed became a destructive plant that eventually overtook and overcame the good plant.

All three evangelists (Matthew, Mark and Luke) use the word “choked” to describe the action of the undesirable plants on the good plant. The Greek word means “to press around or to throng so as to almost suffocate; to strangle.” The life of the good plant was suffocated by the presence of the undesirable plants.

#### 2. The spiritual problems

The spiritual problems this soil represents are immaturity and unfruitfulness. Because of a certain set of conditions in the heart, this believer, although having heard and received the seed of God’s Word, never comes to proper maturity. This kind of immaturity is marked by childishness, irresponsibility, weakness and vacillation.

Spiritual immaturity always leads to spiritual unfruitfulness. The spiritually unfruitful person has little or nothing to show as evidence of spiritual growth and health.

#### 3. Uprooting the weeds

Spiritual immaturity and unfruitfulness are caused by the presence of three suffocating “weeds” in the heart. Let’s look at these and what it takes to uproot them.

- The first weed is anxiety—“the worries of this life” (Mark 4:19). Anxiety is suffocating because it: keeps us preoccupied with needs and problems instead of resources and solutions; weakens our resistance (spiritually, emotionally, physically); invalidates our trust in God; frantically drives us to self-absorption, self-protection and isolation.

Anxiety is uprooted by prayerful, thankful trust in God that brings peace in place of worry.

**Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV)** *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

- The second weed that suffocates believers is “the deceitfulness of wealth” (Mark 4:19). Pursuing wealth can become consuming and deceptively distort our value system. We are deceived in this way when we have a persistent personal discontentment, a self-worth linked to wealth or possessions, jealousy, envy and a resistance to giving.

This deceitfulness is uprooted by a deep contentment in God’s faithfulness and promise of provision in Christ.

**Philippians 4:12-13, 19 (NIV)** *I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength. ... <sup>19</sup> And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*

**1 Timothy 6:17 (NIV)** *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.*

- The third weed is “the desires for other things” (Mark 4:19). Luke 8:14 tells us that those affected by this weed are “choked by life’s ... pleasures.” These may be obviously wrong and sinful, or they may be legitimate pleasures we allow to become prominent and inappropriate priorities.

These desires are uprooted by finding our delight in the Lord and our relationship with Him.

**Psalms 37:4 (ESV)** *Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

Jesus says, “Watch out for the weeds that will take over the soil of your heart and suffocate your spiritual life.” Spiritual immaturity and unfruitfulness are the result of weedy, uncultivated soil. You can overcome these by growing deeper in your trust in God, being content with all He provides and delighting yourself in the rich relationship you have in Christ.

### Discussion questions

1. How do “the worries of this life ... choke the word” (Mark 4:18-19) and make it unfruitful? How does Philippians 4:6-7 speak to you about uprooting this weed from your heart?
2. Read Philippians 4:12-13, 19. How can a deep contentment in God’s faithfulness and provision help uproot “the deceitfulness of wealth” in your life?
3. Read Psalm 37:4. What does it mean to “delight yourself in the Lord”? In what ways does this delight keep ungodly desires from taking root in your heart?