



GOOD SOIL FOR GOOD SEED

LESSON 4 // HOW TO MAKE A GOOD GARDEN

There's a significant difference in the fruitfulness of various gardens. Casual gardeners never get the same results as the serious gardener. The dedicated gardener knows how to get the best and most out of his soil.

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus teaches us about spiritual gardens. He describes a farmer sowing seed that falls on four kinds of soil. The results of the sowing vary depending on the condition of the soil, and only the good soil—a good heart—produces lasting results.

Mark 4:8, 20 (NIV) *Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times. ...²⁰ Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.*

Luke 8:8, 15 (NIV) *Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown. ...¹⁵ But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.*

These verses describe the fruitful garden Jesus wants to produce in us as His followers. Let's look at three important aspects of this garden so we can cultivate the "good soil" it requires.

1. A good garden is measured.

Jesus tells us that the seed "yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown" (Luke 8). The seed of God's Word was unquestionably good. But the difference in this phenomenal harvest was the good soil (Luke 8:15).

It's important to note that good soil is measured by the quantity and quality of fruit it produces. This is the only way the real condition of our heart can be measured. Fruitfulness is the measure, rather than just feelings or knowledge (see Psalm 1:1-3; Matthew 3:10; 12:33-35; John 15; James 3:17-18).

Spiritual fruit for us as followers of Jesus is measured in two primary ways: the expression of Christ's life in us (integrity) and the extension of His love through us (influence).

2. A good garden is made.

The good soil that is highly fruitful refers to "a noble and good heart" (Luke 8:15). Good gardens and good soil don't just happen. They must be made. The same is true for a good heart. It must be made receptive and fertile if the seed of God's Word is to produce fruit there.

Good soil in our hearts, the kind that becomes phenomenally fruitful, is soil that has been “made good by the working of God’s grace” (C. H. Spurgeon). The release of God’s grace that makes our heart noble and good involves His:

- Plowing—conviction and repentance. He cuts the furrows of our heart. He turns the soil.
- Watering—salvation by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). He gives us a new heart and spirit (Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:24-27).
- Nourishing—sanctification. God empowers us to receive His life and walk in His ways as we live in humility before Him.

3. A good garden is maintained.

While God’s grace makes the garden of our heart good, we are still responsible for both the making and maintenance of a good heart. We need to:

- Tune our ear to heaven’s frequency: “hear the Word.” This involves tuning out other frequencies and listening attentively to what the Lord says.

John 10:27 (NIV) *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.*

- Take seriously the truth we hear: “retain the Word.” We must “grab the truth” and take it to heart.

John 8:31-32 (NIV) *To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

- Translate the truth we hear into persistent actions: “persevere.” Patient, consistent obedience to God’s Word brings phenomenal fruitfulness. Never underestimate where perseverance in obedience to God’s Word will lead you! A lifetime of persevering obedience will be measured in terms of thirty, sixty or hundredfold returns.

James 1:22 (NIV) *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*

Jesus wants us to cultivate good soil in our hearts for the seed of His Word. This is how He makes a fruitful garden that glorifies Him and attracts others to His goodness and love.

Discussion questions

1. Why is it important to measure the real condition of your heart by fruitfulness instead of feelings?
2. How does God work by His grace to make the soil of your heart “noble and good”?
3. Why do we need to “translate the truth we hear into persistent actions”? How is patient, consistent obedience to God’s Word a key to great fruitfulness?