

THE SOWER AND THE SEED

My kids are digital natives. They post their lives on social media. I personally just do not have any desire to share photos of what I had for tea last night to all my contacts. Even if Ros and I went out and had a very special tea somewhere, I still don't have any great desire to share it with everyone. But I am on social media, and during lockdown, I spent more time on it than I normally would. People post all kinds of things. Some you just ignore. Some maybe spend half a minute looking at. Some might cause you to do something – make a comment, or take some action.

Reality is that words can have incredible power. But the same words can cause a whole range of responses in people. People don't all react the same way to the same words. Some people get really angry at some posts, others deeply offended, other find them funny.

The story of the sower and the seed is a famous parable about responses. Many of you are aware of the background. For those of you who are not, the story is about a farmer sowing seed. He would first break up the ground with a plough. Then they would use a hoe to break up the clumps. The farmer would then put a sack over his shoulder and scatter the seed by hand. A bit like you might do to sow a lawn.

Simple story to understand. Jesus gives an explanation as well that makes it even easier. Seed is God's word. But can be also just God's voice. Soil represents our hearts.

2 questions to pose as we think about this simple story. One is about the soil. The other is about harvest.

Who is responsible for the state of the soil?

If it is your backyard, and you are planting stuff, then you are responsible for the soil. You dig it over. You put compost in it. You put fertilizer in it. That is, the sower is responsible. But here the soil represents our hearts. And we are responsible for the state of our hearts.. Us.

Drew up this little table.

1. Person the hears the message. But seed falls on hard soil. Snatched away by the enemy. This persons heart is hard. They are not open to responding. Possible that we can harden our heart to God over a particular issue. We read the Bible but we don't want to know about issues of social justice. We don't want to hear what God says about poverty. We don't want to hear about what God says about our finances. We hear but our heart is hard.

2. Second person hears and responds. sAys with great joy. Emotional response. Like when people say to me after the service. Great message pastor. Was it great because it was entertaining? Was it great because it got to their emotions? To me a great message is one that causes a person to do something different. We can say that was great. However, our response has no depth unless they do something. When any opposition comes, they wilt away. They respond but are not willing to pay any cost. God's word is great until we have to pay something for it. No deep roots. Shallow heart. Maybe there is an expectation that God will make life easier, maybe bought into a prosperity doctrine. God bless with health and wealth.

So how do we allow the roots of God's word to go deep into us?

Briefly Col 2:6-7 Ps 1, Eph 3:17

Five disciplines - regular conscious decisions

1. Spend time with good people I do not mean just people you like. However, good people who are committed to God. Spur us on to go deeper.
 2. Spend time reading the word. Soaking in it meditating on it. Letting it go deep within us.
 3. Spend time being thankful. Basic discipline that shows humility, dependence on God. Recognition of who he is.
 4. Spend time developing intimacy with God. Edh talks of growing deeper in the love of God. That you become aware of how much you are loved by God. Intimacy in your prayer life where you can tell God anything. Listening to his voice.
 5. Choose to say no to things that displease God
3. Third person hears and responds. It says the seed fell among thorns. So the soil was good. Things could grow their. Roots could develop deeply. I pull thistles out of my paddock. They have deep roots. But the issue here is the seed is being crowded out by other plants. In the interpretation Jesus says this is when the message is crowded out by the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life. So they never grow to maturity. Calling this the distracted heart. This is so relevant to many of us. Our lives are just so busy pursuing all kinds of things. Family worries, want more money for stuff, and so much entertainment we can have. Not that these things in themselves are wrong. However, they crowd out our time. We no longer have time to pursue the disciplines needed. It is a constant battle. Idols are so



tempting, so demanding. Advertising is continually telling us. You need this. This will make your life so much better. Everyone else is having this experience so you should too. Creates a huge subconscious pressure. My kids are missing out if you do not do this. I am missing what everyone else is doing. One thing lockdown showed us was we could live a slower paced life. A less cluttered life.

4 The fourth heart hears, responds, allows deep roots to grow, and is committed to pursue God. Good soil represents honest good-hearted people who hear God's message, cling to it. In addition, steadily produce a huge harvest. This is the only soil that produces fruit. This seed not only survives but it reproduces. Clings to it. Committed heart

So using our little table. 4 factors that ensure good soil good heart. See that need all four elements. Progression going on here. 1. Hears, humility open heartedness to listen and hear. 2. responds, they do something. 3. deep roots, 4. committed. Single focus.

Actually this is our responsibility. We are responsible for the state of our hearts. We choose whether we have an openness to listen. We choose whether we respond to what God is saying. We choose whether we build the disciplines in our lives that enable God to develop deep roots that will survive the trials and tests. We choose whether we allow money, worry and pleasure to come before God.

How is the state of your heart this morning. Hard , shallow, distracted, committed.

2nd question that this passage provoked in me.

Are we expecting a harvest?

The seed is the power of God's word. And we should expect that God changes things. We cannot remain the same when God is in our lives.

So it raises all kinds of questions.

Are we sowing seed? Yes some will be rejected. You could say from the story that 3 out of 4 reject the message. That is not our responsibility. Our responsibility is for state of our own hearts. However, we are responsible to be sowing the seed are you sowing the seed of the word of God in your world? Where God has placed you

Are we seeing personal growth. We should expect to see personal growth. God cannot be in our lives and nothing happen. John Ortberg tells the story of Hank, a person in a church he was in. Hank was grumpy, dour guy. He had been like that all his life. He once reported the church to noise control for having too loud a music. And there was no expectation that there was not normal or right. Hank had sat through 100's of sermons. But he never changed. People just accreted that this was what Hank was like, But surely we should expect to see people becoming more Christ

like. More loving, more thankful, more caring. More joyful. We should expect to see personal transformation.

Are we seeing others coming to faith? I used to feel guilty when I read passages like this. I would think Well, I have not led hundreds to faith. I am not converting the people who sit on the aeroplane with me. My life is not producing a harvest so there is something wrong with me.

I think a better question is. Are we are a church seeing people come to faith. We are not always aware of the impact we are having with our lives. We don't know what seeds we have sown. But I fear we have lost expectation that the gospel, the seed, is transformational. The gospel changes lives. We need an expectation as a church that we will see lives changed. People coming to faith.

I have been meditating this year on the Lord's Prayer and the scripture around it. The other day I made a decision to ask God for 10 people to come to faith in the next year. Reflecting on the man waking up his friend at night for bread. In addition, the instruction Knock, seek ask. Encouragement to boldly ask the Father. Audacious. So I am asking. Next 12 months. 10 people make a commitment to faith, in the baptismal pool. I am asking God for a harvest. Expectation in my own heart of a harvest. Love you to join me in this. But even if you don't, I am going to pray. Keep on asking. Keep on knocking. We should expect a harvest because the seed is the word of God and the word of God is powerful.

Two questions

What is the state of your heart this morning?

Are you expecting a harvest?

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

1. *Can you think of a season when your heart was each of the four states talked of in the sermon: hard, shallow, distracted, committed?*
2. *Which of the 5 disciplines for developing deep roots do you need to work on at the present?*
3. *What can we do to stop our hearts becoming distracted?*
4. *How have you grown (seen a harvest) in the last 10 years?*
5. *Have we lost expectation that God's word will produce a harvest both personally and as a church? How can we change that?*



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