

"The Parable of the Sower"

PART 1 – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

ABOUT PARABLES

Jesus often used real-life events to help people understand spiritual truths. Here he uses an illustration of a farmer sowing seed. The word "sowing" has to do with planting the seed by scattering it across the ground. When this was done, the seed would land on different types of ground – and the type of ground would influence the final outcome of the seed.

In this Parable of the Sower, we learn a lot about salvation, such as:

- How we should respond to the Word of God
- Why different people react differently to the Word of God
- The difference between someone who *claims* to be saved, and someone who actually *is* saved.

There is also a *danger* in parables. These aren't merely interesting stories; but are teachings about the kingdom of God, which *require* a response from the listener. When people are exposed to the truth, there are two possible responses:

- They may accept it, and be changed by it.
- They may reject or ignore it, and become hardened in their hearts. In the end, they may become unable to understand or accept what it teaches.

Each person will be held accountable for his response to the truth he hears.

WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE THIS EVENT? (The context of the parable.)

The gospel accounts are not always presented in exact chronological order. Some events may be arranged in a logical (or topical) order, or may be part of a random collection of statements. However, when comparing the accounts (in Matthew, Mark and Luke), the following events seem to lead up to the teaching of this parable:

- **The religious leaders rejected Jesus** and accused him of being demon possessed. (By implication, they claimed themselves to be godly!) In reality, they were blaspheming the work of the Spirit. It would be impossible for them to *ever* be saved, because they would *never* be willing to recognize the Spirit for who he is. (Matthew 12:22-32; Mark 3:22-30)
- **Jesus called the religious leaders "a wicked and adulterous generation."** The "fruit" of their lives was proof that his claim was true. It was *not* the "fruit of salvation"! (Matthew 12:33-45)

In all three accounts, the following events are directly connected with the parable. Matthew and Mark place them in *chronological* order, mentioning them immediately *before* the parable (with Matthew stating the both occurred the same day – 13:1). Luke places them in *logical* order, mentioning them *after* the parable (linking them with the fourth type of soil).

- **Jesus' biological family went to get him** (while he was confronting the religious leaders). Most of his family did not believe who he was, until later. (Matthew 12:46-47; Mark 3:31-32; Luke 8:19-20)
- **Jesus used their coming as an opportunity to point out the *real* citizens of the kingdom** – his *real* "mother and brothers." (Matthew 12:48; Mark 3:33)

- **The citizens of the kingdom are those who not only *hear* the will of God, but who also *do* it.** They have the righteous "fruit" that the religious leaders lacked. (Matthew 12:49-50; Mark 3:34-35; Luke 8:21)
 - **Jesus told the Parable of the Sower to illustrate this fact.** Each of the four types of people described in the parable *hear* the Word (at least in some sense); but only one type will *do* it. Only one will have the fruit that citizens of the kingdom will have.
-

PART 2 – INTRODUCTION

This parable can be found in Matthew, Mark and Luke. The three accounts parallel each other; but since the author of each book described the event in a way that was best for his specific readers, there are small differences between them. We can compare all three accounts to gain as many insights as possible.

GENERAL PURPOSE OF THE PARABLE

In Matthew 12, the Pharisees *reject* Jesus. Jesus now begins to teach in such a way that:

- those who accepted him would gain further understanding, and
- those who rejected him would *not* gain further understanding (and perhaps would lose what little understanding they had – the truth they had despised).

This parable describes *how* people respond to the Good News about Jesus – both in Jesus' day, as well as today. It also explains the differences between the response of those who *are* citizens of God's kingdom, and those who are *not*.

EMPHASIS ON *HEARING*

Both in the parable, and in the surrounding context, there is a strong emphasis on the concept of *hearing*:

- Within the parable and its explanation: "Listen." (Matthew 13:18; Mark 4: 3)
- Immediately after telling the parable: "He who has ears (to hear) let him hear." (Matthew 13:13-15; Mark 4:9; Luke 8:10)
- When Jesus explains *why* he speaks in parables, he uses an Old Testament passage that explains why some can't hear – "ever hearing but never understanding." (Matthew 13:13-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10)
- Mark and Luke include an additional warning: "Consider carefully what you hear / how you listen." (Mark 4:24; Luke 8:18)

What does it mean, "He who has ears, let him hear"?

All four types of people "hear" the message, in the sense of being exposed to it. The "seed" (Word of God) is given to all of them. This parable does not deal with those who have *never* heard (never been exposed to) the message.

- The importance of having an opportunity to hear the "seed" is mentioned in Romans 10:14-15. We also read that, at the Day of Justice, people who have never had the opportunity to hear will be judged according to what they *do* know, instead of by what they never had the opportunity to hear. (Romans 2:14-15)

In this parable, the main focus is on a different type of "hearing" – one which results in a change in one's relationship to Jesus, and a change in one's values and conduct.

- Some "hear," yet the message has no effect on their values and conduct. They refuse to accept the message; they oppose it; they are *spiritually dead*.
- Others hear and it results in a changed life and attitude. These people accept the message and are changed (they accept it by the power of the Spirit – Matthew 13:11); they are *spiritually awakened*.

The phrase, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches," occurs several times in Revelation 2-3. It describes a willingness (and spiritual receptivity) to accept the message as *true*. (See also another example of this phrase in Matthew 11:15.)

Why do some "Hear," but others "Not Hear"?

According to Matthew 13:15, some are unable to hear, because of their calloused hearts.

- Desensitized; no longer receptive of the truth.
- Hardened because they refused to be "softened."
- *If* they had listened and accepted, *then* they would have changed. (In other words, it's *not* the message's fault.)

Why did Jesus speak in parables (Matthew 13:10+)? Those who were willing to listen would grow in their understanding of the truth. But for those who refused to accept the truth, the parable would accomplish the very judgment that Jesus described in these verses.

- This parable is a judgment against those who have rejected Jesus and the truth about him. They refused the truth... now they won't get it.

One's ability to receive truth is not a fixed, unchanging process. Rather, it *increases* or *decreases*, depending on one's response to the truth. (Matthew 13: 12)

- The result will be either judgment (v. 13) or blessing (v. 16-17).
- Some other illustrations of the "judgment" aspect:
 - When Israel rejected the truth, the nation was hardened. (Romans 11:8 – although, according to other verses, there would still be a "remnant" who would receive God's blessing)
 - Those who choose to follow the "Lawless one" will be sent a "delusion," so that they will believe the lie. (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 – contrasted with those who accept the truth, v. 13)
 - Those who chose to worship and serve created things would be "given over" to their sins. (Romans 1:18+)

"Hearing" in the parable itself – What is "heard"? The WORD!

All four types of soil (representing people) "hear," but they are affected different ways. Most do *not* have a "life-changing" hearing.

The "word" (message) is what is "heard" – this phrase occurs often in the explanation. Examples:

- The message of the kingdom. (Matthew 13:19)
- The Word. (Mark 4:14)
- The Word of God. (Luke 8:11)

The parable describes different ways people respond to the word (the message they are hearing). *All hear with physical ears; few hear with "spiritual ears"*

When we look at the events that had just taken place, we discover that the responses described in the parable were actually occurring at that moment. In a sense, the parable was being "fulfilled" by the people who were present, at the very time Jesus spoke it!

- *Those who rejected the truth:* They should have received this parable as a *warning*; yet because of their rejection, they probably didn't even comprehend Jesus' description of their actions!
- *Those who accepted the truth:* They *would* comprehend what the parables meant, even if it took further "enlightening" for them to understand it. For example: Some of his disciples originally did *not* understand the parable, but they *desired* to. Their lack of understanding was *temporary*. Since they didn't *reject* the message, they asked further about it, and learned its meaning. (Mark 4:10; Luke 8:9)

Today, this parable has value for both speaker and hearer. From the speaker's perspective, this parable illustrates (and explains) the responses of his hearers, any time the word is preached. From the hearer's perspective, it illustrates (or explains) the way *we* are hearing or responding.

ILLUSTRATING THE WAY GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY FIT TOGETHER

1. Scripture tells us that the Word *will* accomplish *its* purpose, but not necessarily *our* purpose. (Illustration: Isaiah 55:10)
2. This does not deny human responsibility – see James 1:21(+). In fact, Scripture often places the two concepts side-by-side in the same context! (Examples: John 6:37 and Romans 9-10)
3. When people hear, it is not us, but the *Holy Spirit*, using the Word, who enables people to "hear." (1 Corinthians 2:12-13; 2 Corinthians 4:5-7) Because of this, we speak; but when people accept the message, we give *God* the credit, rather than taking it for ourselves.
4. We do not deny *our* responsibility to carefully teach the Word. (1 Timothy 4:13-16)

The parable shows that our response is important; it is not "cancelled" by God's sovereignty.

This can be seen by the very fact that "hearing" is so strongly stressed.

Of those who "hear" (in the sense of exposure to the truth) there are four responses, based on the way they "hear" it (their spiritual understanding of that truth).

- From the "human responsibility" perspective, if they aren't willing to pursue it until they "hear" it *properly*; they will lose their ability to do so. (See also: 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12; 1 Corinthians 1:18-19)

Just how important is human responsibility?

God has no obligation to save us. We don't *deserve* the good news, so if we are given the opportunity to hear it, *we had better take it seriously*. When a person rejects or ignores the Good News, God has no obligation to give him another opportunity (though he can graciously do so, if he desires).

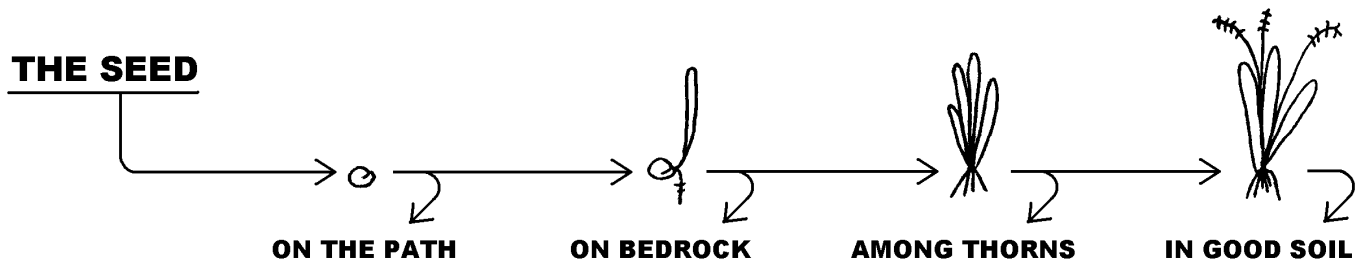
God's sovereignty *guarantees* that we will be held accountable for our response to the Good News. We cannot despise God's Word and expect to get away with it. If we refuse to voluntarily humble ourselves before God (James 4:10), *he* will humble us (at the Day of Justice), and we will have no choice in the matter.

If, in exercising our human responsibility, we reject the free offer of the Good News, the only option left is for us to discover the reality of this warning from Scripture: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10:31, KJV)

PART 3 – THE FOUR TYPES OF RESPONSES

These four responses represent the most basic types of response – patterns or categories – of response.

- In some people, the response may be more obvious than in others.
- For some, their response may seem to be a mixture of the first three types.



The following information is based on all three accounts (Matthew 13; Mark 4 and Luke 8), with additional comments added from other Scripture passages.

ABOUT THE SEED (THE MESSAGE BEING SPOKEN) – the message of the kingdom / the Word of God / the Word.

- People must hear / be told... – Romans 10:14; Mark 4:21:23; Luke 8:16-17.
- It must be the Word of God that they're told... – James 1:21; 1 Peter 1:23.

	On the Path	On Bedrock	Among Thorns	Good Soil
What happens to the seed	No entrance into the soil.	Receives little or no moisture.	Never matures.	Fruitful.
The final outcome	Snatched-away (immediately); trampled / eaten.	Withered, scorched, dies.	Choked; does not bear grain (no value).	Fruitful; multiplying.

- The *Word* bears fruit in the good soil – compare to Colossians 1:6.

ABOUT THE SOIL (THE PERSON HEARING THE MESSAGE)

	On the Path	On Bedrock	Among Thorns	Good Soil
Basic Description	Doesn't understand; (therefore) <i>can't</i> believe and be saved. (See the note below.)	Quickly receive; quickly fall away when tested (or when they see the trials coming).	Preoccupied with the things of life ("choked" by them); <i>not</i> fruitful or mature. (Any appearance of "fruit" is more like aborted fruit.)	Good and noble heart; understands, accepts and retains the truth; perseveres and is fruitful (a crop) to one degree or other.

- NOTE: This does not prove that we failed to use the right presentation "technique." Though we must speak carefully and accurately, there will be times that they don't understand *regardless* of how we present it. Though Ephesians 4:17-19 actually applies to *each* of the first three responses, it seems especially true of this first type of response.

	On the Path	On Bedrock	Among Thorns	Good Soil
His Heart (this refers to his mind, will, intellect, etc.)	Blinded <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By choice. (Romans 1:18) By nature. (Ephesians 2:3) By the god of this age. (2 Corinthians 4:4) Characterized by a hardened heart and a darkened understanding. (Ephesians 4:18)	Self-serving Desires the "easy life"; backs away when it isn't there. Characterized by his avoidance of the "discomforts" of following Jesus.	Divided interests, double-minded – eyes on other things (not on the Word). His heart is filled with intruders; he allows competition with the Word. Characterized by his wrong priorities: He may be preoccupied with "good" things, but he neglects the things that God says are more important.	Good and noble (in attitude, actions, nature, character). Illustration: Acts 17:11
His Faith	Non-existing (no response), <i>though he may be quite religious.</i>	Temporary, <i>though he may look good for a while.</i>	Useless and immature, incomplete (James 2:17, 20, 26), <i>though he may never publicly reject Christ.</i>	Perfect, "saving faith."
Is he saved?	No	No	No. He may <i>claim</i> to be saved, but there is no evidence. He has no legitimate basis for making that claim, or for having an "assurance of salvation." (Matthew 6:19-24 – you <i>can't</i> have both God <i>and</i> the world.)	Yes. He is recognized by his <i>fruit</i> . (Matthew 7:21-23 and the expanded context in 7:13-27; 13:16-17; Hebrews 11; James 2:22-25)

EXAMPLES OF PEOPLE WHO MAY BELONG TO THESE FOUR CATEGORIES

	On the Path	On Bedrock	Among Thorns	Good Soil
N.T. Examples	Many of the Pharisees (even though they sometimes tolerated the message – John 5:35). Most of the nation of Israel. (Romans 10:1-3) Paul, <i>before</i> his salvation.	The Judaizers? (Galatians 6:12) Judas. Simon the sorcerer. Many of Jesus' followers mentioned in John 6:60,66 (their expectations were not met, and they became disillusioned).	Perhaps Martha, contrasted to Mary. (Luke 10:38) For her, this may have been temporary, but it illustrates the attitude of such people. Demas – 2 Timothy 4:10 Some of the Pharisees – John 12:42-43	The apostles and other disciples. Note: Beware of imitators who may look good for a while. 1 John teaches about the differences between the genuine followers of Jesus and the fakes.
Modern-day examples	Most of the people we meet, today.	Many who have been misled by false "gospels" (such as the "health and wealth" gospel). Many who "make decisions" without knowing what that "decision" means. They may leave when their expectations are not met.	Most of "Western Christianity" – preoccupied with the pursuit of the "American Dream," the "good life," etc.	Any genuine disciple. Hebrews 10:16; Mark 12:28-34; Revelation 12:11; 1 John 3:1-3; Titus 2:11-14; 3:3-8; Psalm 1; 2 Peter 1:3-4

CONTRASTING THE RESPONSES OF PEOPLE – In each instance, the disciple will respond differently than the way the non-disciple will.

Response to...	... The Word (illustrated by the Path)	... Trials (illustrated by the Bedrock)	... The World (illustrated by the Thorns)	... Fruit (illustrated by the Good Soil)
A NON-DISCIPLE'S response... (The first three types of soil)	Disregards or suppresses the truth. (Romans 1:28) He might not realize the full significance of what he is doing, because he is spiritually blind; but he will be judged fairly, based on his choices. (John 12:48; Acts 17:29-31; Romans 2:5-11)	Turns away / "melts away" when persecution or trials come. (Luke 12:5; 1 John 2:19) The result... Hebrews 6:4-8.	May fit in and be accepted by the world. Even if he doesn't fit in, the things of the world preoccupy his thinking, and are the main influence for his conduct. He is not necessarily excessive (or extravagant) in his worldliness.	None of the first 3 are like this (though they may imitate it in some ways – external actions).

<p>Some additional comments</p>	<p>This person responds this way because he does not have ears to hear, etc.</p>	<p>This person has no nourishment or strength to get him through the trials and difficulties. Using a different analogy, he is not connected to the "vine," Jesus Christ. (John 15:6)</p>	<p>It is difficult (though not totally impossible) for a rich person to be saved. The godliest people tend to be those who have the <i>least</i> distractions in their lives – the <i>opposite</i> of the people in this group!</p>	<p>This last response is the only legitimate option for a follower of Jesus.</p>
--	--	---	---	--

<p>Response to...</p>	<p>... The Word (illustrated by the Path)</p>	<p>... Trials (illustrated by the Bedrock)</p>	<p>... The World (illustrated by the Thorns)</p>	<p>... Fruit (illustrated by the Good Soil)</p>
<p>A DISCIPLE'S response... (The fourth type of soil)</p>	<p>A disciple would receive it. He would understand / accept / retain.</p>	<p>A disciple would persevere / be strengthened. (Hebrews 10:37-39) (See also: Matthew 10:28, 32-22; James 1:12; 1 Peter 4:12-19; Romans 5:1-5; 8:18-39)</p>	<p>A disciple would be a stranger or alien to the world. (1 Peter 1:17; Hebrews 11:13, 24-26) He is hated by the world. (John 15; 1 John 3:13) He does not love the things of the world. (1 John 2:15-17) (See also: James 2:14-26; Matthew 10:37-39; John 15)</p>	<p>A disciple will be fruitful. He desires to do God's will – and the desire is embedded in his heart and mind (Hebrews 10:16). He "works out" the salvation that is in his heart, knowing that God is working <i>within</i> him to bring about both the desire and the resulting action. (Philippians 2:12-13 – God's sovereignty and human responsibility work together)</p>
<p>Can a disciple NOT be this way?</p>	<p>Perhaps a temporary unbelief in some things. But it <i>cannot</i> be his lifestyle. (Examples: Luke 1:20, Zechariah; Mark 4:40; Luke 24:11;41; Mark 16:11-14)</p>	<p>Perhaps a temporary "falling" in some things. But it <i>cannot</i> be his lifestyle. (Example: Mark 14:27)</p>	<p>Perhaps a temporary worldliness in some things. But it <i>cannot</i> be his lifestyle. (Those who make it a lifestyle are deceived – James 1:22.)</p>	<p>God will keep him this way. God will discipline him, if necessary. (Hebrews 12:4-13) A different analogy: God will "prune" him, to make him more fruitful. (John 15:2)</p>

SOME FACTS ABOUT GENUINE DISCIPLES (THE "GOOD SOIL"):

From the "God's sovereignty" perspective:

- They have become partakers of the God's "divine nature" (his moral characteristics), in contrast to the others, who are by nature objects of God's wrath. (2 Peter 1:3+; contrasted to Ephesians 2:3)
- They are taught by Grace. (Titus 2:11-13)
- God puts his moral law in their hearts, so they will desire to *not* be like the other three types of soil. (Hebrews 10:16)
- God will discipline them, to keep them in the right way. (Hebrews 12:5-13; Psalm 119:67, 71, 75)

From the "human responsibility" perspective:

- They purify themselves. (1 John 3:3)
- They pursue the "fruit of salvation." (More comments about this in a later section.)

Psalm 1 illustrates the contrast between the righteous (good soil) and the wicked (the other three).

2 Timothy 2:19 contains both sovereignty and responsibility elements:

- SOVEREIGNTY: "The Lord knows those who belong to him." This "knowing" is an active concept that accomplishes what is being known.
- RESPONSIBILITY: "Those who belong to him *must* turn away from wickedness." Sin is not an option.
- Both of these concepts complement each other, and always work together in genuine salvation.

THE FINAL OUTCOME of their response

	On the Path	On Bedrock	Among Thorns	Good Soil
Their focus	Focus on the present ("now"), and on themselves (or <i>anything</i> except God and his glory). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When they <i>do</i> focus on eternity, it is for self-centered reasons (such as what <i>they</i> can get out of "going to heaven"), rather than for God's glory. 			Focus on the future, eternity, God's honor and glory.
Their "first love"	Ultimately, it is themselves. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "What's in it for me?" Even their religious activities have a self-centered focus – what they think it will get for them. • They may have acts of kindness toward people... but they will do it for the wrong reasons (such as to "feel good," or "for humanitarian reasons"), or they will ignore the <i>most important</i> reason (God's honor and glory). 			God (first) and neighbor (second). They are concerned about God's honor and glory. They care more about others than about themselves.
The end result – Final response to the message	Unaware, unconscious to the meaning of the message.	No longer cares for it or wants it.	Interested in what they can get (privileges or rewards), but not concerned about responsibilities and obligations.	Wants to glorify God and to serve him.

- Note that the first three types of hearers can still have what they claim to be "life-changing experiences"; but their experiences will *not* be based on the Word of God.

PART 4 – CONCLUSION

We must respond to this parable; we cannot merely ignore it.

- *Human responsibility*: Those who are *willing* to pay attention (to learn from it and to respond properly) will have opportunity for even more learning (and responding).
- *God's sovereignty*: Those who are *not willing* to pay attention (and respond properly) will lose whatever opportunities they have. In the end, God may even let them believe the lie they so much desire (compare to 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

HEED THE WARNING!

Mark and Luke end with a warning. Truth is meant to be *visible* (not hidden): It must be *lived*.

- In Matthew, the warning is mentioned elsewhere in the book – Jesus often said similar things on different occasions. One such passage reads: "Let your light shine before men..." (Matthew 5:16). This is a command (hence mandatory), not a mere suggestion.
- We *must* be like the fourth type of soil.

Be careful how you hear!

This focuses on the "human responsibility" side of the issue.

If you have the truth, God expects – and requires – it to be *visible*.

- If you *are* receptive to the truth, it *will* be evident.
- Can a person who has the truth in him *not* be like the fourth type of soil? Only temporarily – and it won't be his lifestyle or desire.

Remember also that the way you respond *now* will influence your ability to respond *later*.

What must you do, to have "hearing ears"?

1. You must *hear* – be exposed to – the Word of God. (Romans 10:14)
2. You must combine hearing with *faith* – acceptance of what was heard. (Hebrews 4:2)
3. You must combine faith with *action* – obedience to the will of God. (James 2; Acts 26:20)

Can you have "hearing ears"? Only by the power of the Spirit. However, don't use that as an excuse to ignore your responsibility. Do what God requires of you, and let him "worry" about his part. (He has promised that he *will* do it.)

- Don't sit back and wait till you "feel" the Holy Spirit working!
- Read and study God's Word.
- Ask God to:
 - Melt your hardened, calloused heart.
 - Open your closed eyes and ears.
 - Change you and give you the gift of *life* – to replace the spiritual *deadness* you already have.
- Accept what the Word says, and begin to do what it says – even *when* others (who might disapprove) are watching.
- If you succeed – and you will, if your desire is genuine – give *God* the credit and glory.

If you claim that you already can hear...

Do you *eagerly desire* to be *more* fruitful, and *less* like the other three types of hearers?

- If not, you should consider the possibility that you might *be* one of the other types of hearers. (You are acting like one of them.)
- If so, you should pray that God will make you even more the way you should be.
Ask God to "prune" your branches (John 15:2b) – he will discipline you and do what is necessary to make you more fruitful.
The end result? If you are the fourth type of soil, you will end up with more trust in him, spiritual growth, thankfulness for what he has done, etc.

Now it is time for you to respond. Which type of soil are you?

PART 5 – FOR FURTHER STUDY: Additional comments about various concepts mentioned in these passages.

THE SEED

Scattering / sowing the seed (i.e., the Word of God)

God gives the increase – 1 Corinthians 3:6-8.

The *Word* planted in you is what saves your soul – James 1:21 (v. 22 – if you don't have fruit, you are deceived).

ON THE PATH

The evil one, etc.

- About him
The world is under his control – 1 John 5:19
He devours like a lion – 1 Peter 5:8
He disguises himself as an angel of light – 2 Corinthians 11:14
- The "power of Satan"
Part of Paul's mission was to turn people away from it – Acts 26:18

Understanding / believing / receiving the Word

- Faith (trust / believing) is needed, in order to please God
Hebrews 11:6 – believing who he is and what he does
- Understand
Only through the Holy Spirit – 1 Corinthians 2:9-11, contrasted with v.12-14
Associated with the fear of God – Proverbs 1:7.
Its source is God – 1 John 5:20.
- The Word received with humility – James 1:21.

- The Word viewed as truly being *God's Word* – 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

Interesting use of 2 of the words in a different context

- *Snatched*: We (disciples) will not be snatched from God – John 10:28-29.
- *Trampling*: About those who are "trampling" the Son of God – Hebrews 10:29.

ON BEDROCK

Trials – Expect trials (because of the Word, etc.)

Matthew 5:10 (those who *oppose* the Word are always against those who *accept* it)
 Revelation 6:9; 20:4
 1 Peter 4:12; James 1:12+ (don't blame God for trials)

Verses that should affect one's ATTITUDE

Romans 8:28; Acts 20:18-24 (Paul's attitude); 1 Peter 1:6-7; Hebrews 12; 2 Peter 1:10;
 Romans 5:3 (suffering strengthens us)

Perseverance

People who have perseverance are blessed – James 5:11; James 1:12
 It's needed – Hebrews 10:36; example: Hebrews 11:27
 It needs added to faith – 2 Peter 1:6.
 A characteristic of love – 1 Corinthians 13:7.
 Comes from ...
 Suffering – Romans 5:3-4
 Testing of one's faith – James 1:3-4; 5:11

Interesting use of a word in a different context

Withering: Branches that are withered are cut off and burned – John 15:6.

AMONG THORNS

Life's worries

DON'T be filled with worry – it's an expression of unbelief/distrust in God! – Matthew 6:25-34; Luke 12:22-31
 The right priorities – Luke 10:41 (only 1 thing is important)

A study about RICHES (they are deceitful)

- WARNINGS
 - Hard to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (rich young ruler) – Matthew 19:23-24; Mark 10:23-25; Luke 18:24-25
 - Rich people will fade away – James 1:10-11
 - Exploiting the poor – James 2:6
 - Misery to come – James 5:1
 - Woe to them – Luke 6:24 (the poor are blessed)
 - Illustration – the Rich man and Lazarus – Luke 16:19-31
 - A desire for riches is DEADLY – 1 Timothy 6:9-10
- PROPER ATTITUDE
 - Rich toward God – Luke 12:21 (a warning against being rich toward one's self)

Trust in God, not riches – 1 Timothy 6:17

Jesus Christ, our example (of a GIVING attitude) – Philippians 2:5(+); 2 Corinthians 8:9

Being made rich so that we can be generous to others – 2 Corinthians 9:11 [Contrast to the rich young ruler (mentioned above).]

- GOOD "RICHES"
Rich in GOOD DEEDS – 1 Timothy 6:18 (also generous, etc.)
Rich in FAITH – James 2:5
(See also 2 Corinthians 8:2, 9 – rich generosity, even though poor)
- RICHES AND POVERTY
Poor (financially), yet making others rich (spiritually) – 2 Corinthians 6:10
Rich generosity, even though poor – 2 Corinthians 8:2, 9
Contrast: SMYRNA vs. LAODICEA – Revelation 2:9, compared to Revelation 3:17-18
- OUR RICHES IN CHRIST
The unsearchable riches of Christ – Ephesians 3:8
In Christ – all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge – Colossians 2:3
The "cornerstone" (Christ) is precious to us – 1 Peter 2:7
God's glorious riches in Christ Jesus – Philippians 4:19 (from which God will meet your needs)
[Also riches of GRACE, MERCY, etc.]

Treasure

Your heart will be with your treasure – Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 12:33-34

Example (making the right choice) – Moses – Hebrews 11:26

Pleasures / desires

- APOSTATES (including those who are pleasure-oriented) – 2 Peter 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:4
- ABOUT BEING PLEASURE-ORIENTED
Wrong motive for prayer / receiving answers to prayer – James 4:3
Such people are as good as already dead – 1 Timothy 5:6 (spoken about widows)
It's "past tense" for genuine Christians – Titus 3:3
- DESIRES of the Spirit vs. the Flesh – Romans 8:5(+)

One's values are best seen when he is forced to CHOOSE between *two that conflict*.

- Most "church-goers" won't accept what Jesus says about the "thorns" of life. NONE of this can be accepted unless the person first *bears* the Word!

A STUDY ON "THORNS" [could also look at similar concepts, such as "thistles"]

- Came into existence as part of the judgment, when sin entered the world (Genesis 3:18).

Symbolic of obstacles and hindrances

- Evil people

Compared with thorns; destined to be burned – 2 Samuel 23:6-7
Laughter of fools – compared to the sound of burning thorns – Ecclesiastes 7:6

- Destructive adversaries – nations who would be like thorns to Israel
Would have a destructive influence – Joshua 23:13
Won't be present when God restores Israel (future) – Ezekiel 28:24
- Things of this world –
An obstacle to spiritual life – Matthew 13:7, 22; Mark 4:7, 18; Luke 8:7-14

Symbolic of judgment and curse (though the thorns themselves may be literal)

- A nation judged by God
Overrun by thorns – Isaiah 32:13; 34:13; Hosea 10:8
Sowing wheat... reaping thorns – Jeremiah 12:13
The thorns will be removed when God restores their blessings – Isaiah 55:13
- Consequences of one's own sinful conduct
(Literal) – The property of the lazy – covered with thorns – Proverbs 24:30-31
(Symbolic) – The way/path of the lazy and the wicked – characterized by thorns – Proverbs 15:19; 22:5
[The opposite is true for the righteous.]
- A "crown of thorns" – worn by Jesus – Matthew 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2, 5

Thorns used to accomplish something good – a hindrance used by God to prevent sin!

- Israel blocked by thorns, to keep her from her "lovers" – Hosea 2:6
- Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (a messenger of Satan), to keep him from becoming conceited – 2 Corinthians 12:7

"Thorns" and "Fruit"

- The presence of thorns... the absence of fruit – the "Parable of Sower" passages
- The end-result of fruitless, thorny land: to be burned – Hebrews 6:8 (contrast with the productive, fruitful land, v. 7)
- The worthless "fruit" of thorns contrasted with the beneficial fruit of grapes, figs, etc. – Matthew 7:16; Luke 6:44 [The issue of "good" vs. "bad" fruit.]

IN GOOD SOIL

Heart

- THE SOURCE OF ...
Words – Matthew 12:34; Luke 6:45
Actions / thoughts – Matthew 15:18-19
Good / evil – Luke 6:45
- HEART OF A NON-DISCIPLE
Evil – Luke 6:45
Unrepentant – Romans 2:5

Unbelieving – Hebrews 3:12

- HEART OF A DISCIPLE

God's Law is embedded in it – Hebrews 10:16

Pure – Matthew 5:8 (basis for being blessed); 2 Timothy 2:22 (basis for calling on the Lord)

Sincere – Hebrews 10:22

Forgiving – Matthew 18:35 (the alternative – not forgiving others – involves horrible consequences!)

"Fruit" is...

- The RESULTS, not the CAUSE of salvation
The WORD is the cause – Colossians 1:6
- NECESSARY for "assurance of salvation" (James 1:22)
- RESULTS OF REPENTANCE – Matthew 3:8, 10; Luke 3:8-9 (Produce the proper fruit or get cut down!)
- RECOGNIZED by one's fruit – Matthew 7:16-20; 12:33; Luke 6:43-44

"Fruit" in JOHN 15 (read the passage, to find where the following concepts are mentioned)

- If there is NO FRUIT – cut off/burned
- If there is FRUIT – pruned for more!
100% dependent on Jesus
It is evidence that we are his disciples. (See also: Psalm 1:3.)
We are chosen for this purpose. [See also: Romans 7:4-5 – We belong to Jesus for the purpose of fruit-bearing. Previously, we bore fruit for death.]
It will be lasting!

FRUIT – What is it?? It includes...

- Material gifts (given to others) – Romans 15:28
- Every good word – Colossians 1:10
- Fruit of the Spirit – Galatians 5:22-23 [See also 1 Corinthians 13, expressions of love.]
- Righteousness – Philippians 1:11
- A "sacrifice" of praise – Hebrews 13:15
- The concept of "fruit," as used in other passages
The "fruit of righteousness" = peace – Isaiah 32:17
"Good fruit" – one of the expressions of godly wisdom – James 3:17

Crops

- CONTRASTED with thorns and thistles – Hebrews 6:7-8
- An illustration of patience – James 5:7