

Today we conclude our time in the parables of Jesus. I reserved these last few parables we have been in—the sheep and goats, lost sheep, lost coin, lost son, and now today with the parable of the Sower—I’ve reserved these for this fall because they help us refresh ourselves in the purpose as a church.

Each fall, I like to spend a few weeks refreshing our mission because it’s easy to lose sight of the big picture and forget why we do church. We forget our main calling and reason we exist as a church.

Two weeks ago, the parable of the Sheep and Goats reminded us we are to allow our faith in God to express itself with service to others, especially those in God’s family. Authentic faith expresses itself in loving action toward others. I came across this quote this week in my study, *“The only conversions that count in the kingdom are those confirmed by a life of discipleship.”* - C. Keener

Last week we got a refresher course in the deep, relentless love God has for people, even those who are still far from him. I for one am so grateful God has unrelenting love for those far from him, because I once was far from him. But now, in his great love, mercy, and grace, he has brought me close. And his ongoing love is regularly transforming me more and more into his likeness. Fall all that I am indescribably grateful.

Our discussion about God’s great love last week, reminded me of Paul’s powerful prayer in Ephesians 3, “And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Growing in God's love is a life-long learning endeavor for all of us. We'll never fully comprehend it. Which means there are always new dimensions of it to discover.

[Transition] - Today I'd like to conclude our parables series by examining one final parable—the Parable of the Sower. Turn in your Bibles to Luke 8.

This parable is included in three of the four gospels. And it is the first among all the parables recorded in each gospel. It is also one of the very few parables where Jesus gives an interpretation of the parable to the disciples. Also, if you are looking at the text, in each Gospel account, between the parable and the explanation is a statement about why Jesus uses the powerful teaching method of parables.

In fact, before we take a look at the parable and Jesus' explanation, let's deal with this curious statement in the middle—in verses 9-10.

Luke 8:9-10: *"His disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, "though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand."*

At first reading this appears to suggest that Jesus uses parables to keep people from understanding...so they will not repent and be forgiven - which is the exact opposite of everything we know both about Jesus and parables. Why would Mark or Jesus suggest that parables were told to prevent understanding.

The quote that is set off in your Bibles in verse 10 is a section from a larger prophecy of Isaiah in Isaiah 6:9-10. We won't take time to look at the whole thing, but, the Prophet's words are to be understood as irony.

When you use *verbal irony*, you deliberately say something that is the opposite from what you actually mean.

- If you look up at an impending thunderstorm in the sky and say, "It's

a perfect day for a picnic," that's *verbal irony*.

- "I'm so excited to be stuck in this traffic."
- I've seen people open up some super odd gift at Christmas and I'll say, "Wow, that's a really nice one of those."

Sometimes irony comes in the form of sarcasm. When you go to your sister's house and as she's pulling fish sticks out of the microwave you say, "Wow, it looks like you worked incredibly hard making dinner". That's sarcastic irony. As long as your meaning contrasts with what you're saying on purpose, you're using verbal irony.

Now, I don't think Jesus is trying to be funny or sarcastic, but he is quoting the verbal irony of Isaiah for shock value. Jesus is basically telling us that what had happened in Isaiah's day is happening again in Jesus day. And he's trying to wake them up, warn them, and spur them to active listening and responding to his teaching, because judgment is coming.

[Transition] - Does that make sense to all you? I hope that helps clear up confusion on those verses. So, now, let's look at the parable. Read verses 1-8. Now, skip to verse 11 where Jesus explains the precise meaning of the parable of the Sower, seeds and soils to the disciples. Read verses 11-15.

I want to highlight three implications of this parable for our lives as individuals and for our life together as a church.

The first obvious implication of this parable is that regularly sowing lots of seed is required.

Key Lessons from the Parable of the Sower:

1. Regularly sowing lots of seed is required.

In this parable, the farmer represents you and me. Together as the church, we are the farmer. Like the Farmer we are to faithfully sow the

“word” which is basically the seed of the good news of Jesus as Savior. In short, we are to regularly talk about Jesus and tell our story of his impact in our lives as a way of inviting people to connect with him.

As we learn from the rest of the parable, we must sow tons of seed because the obstacles against it are significant. I was never very good at story problems in school. You know the ones: If a train leaves Chicago at 8am traveling 75 miles per hour and another train leaves LA at 6 am traveling 80 miles an hour, where will the two trains meet? UGH...who cares...just fly...it's much easier.

But, if you think about this parable as a story problem...you realize that according to Jesus when a farmer sows seed, it falls on all sorts of different soils and so in the end only 1-in-4 soils end up yielding a harvest. A 25% success rate.

[Illustration]- While this is a sad reality Jesus is pointing out; it actually encourages me. I don't know about you, but I always struggle with being discouraged when I share Christ with someone and they don't accept him, or they say “yes” when I'm talking with them, but then walk away and show no signs of it taking root.

There have been seasons when the teaching team and I will give invitations to accept Christ week after week, and there are no responses. It's easy to start thinking it's about me, it's about how I worded it, or how I explained it. But Jesus is saying...no. That's normal. There's only a 25% return at best.

So, one obvious implication for us as a church is that in our gatherings, with all age groups and in our personal lives, we simply have to sow as much seed as possible because Jesus tells us the return rate is so low.

In other words, we must persistently look for every opportunity to sow the good news that Jesus came to forgive our sin and qualify us for heaven.

Here's the thing...don't miss the simple but important truth of the parable: The farmer has one role in the story– "The farmer sows the seed!" You and I have one role...to share the gospel.

We must never let this responsibility sag. It reminds all of us that we can't lose heart; we must not ever shrink back in the face of a 25% effectiveness rate.

In our routines and in our church, we must regularly sow the news about Jesus. We have to tell our story of his life in our life.

- We must continue to champion efforts like Good News Clubs and our AWANA ministry which are regularly sowing seeds of the gospel among the children of our region.
- We have to boldly budget our Junior and Senior High "outreach events" so that more and more students get a chance to hear about the transformational love of Jesus.
- We must take advantage of holidays like Christmas and Easter to tell adults in our community the story of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection again and again and again.
- We must relentlessly look for ways to build bridges to the various people groups of our foothill region...continually looking for all sorts of ways to build *bridges of good works that generate good will that opens the door to sow the good news!*

[Transition]- The farmer sows the word! That's the farmer's one responsibility in this parable. That's what he's called to do. And when the farmer sows it doesn't always take root. And Jesus is clear, that's not because of how the farmer sowed his seed, it's because the majority seed falls on infertile soil. According to this parable "Gospel productivity depends on heart receptivity."

2. Gospel productivity depends on heart receptivity.

Verse 12 teaches us that 25% of the time the spiritual battle for a person's life is lost before it ever really begins. Jesus says that twenty-five percent

of the time Satan somehow immediately steals the word that was sown in them.

We're not told how Satan does this, but in some way or another he lies, deceives and manipulates the person into a hardness of heart. The truth of Jesus bounces off them like a super ball off the sidewalk.

We have to remember...there is an intense spiritual battle going on for the hearts, minds and souls of every man, woman and child we cross paths with. Paul says in Ephesians 6:12 that our greatest struggles in life are, *"...not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."*

Then he describes the spiritual armor and character development required to fight that spiritual battle and he ends it with this, **"18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."**

Prayer is where the spiritual battles for hearts, souls and minds are won. Because of the intensity of the spiritual resistance, we literally have to pray people into the arms of Jesus. The more we can be praying for friends, family, neighbors or co-workers around us who do not know Jesus, the better. The Bible says people are spiritually blinded so they cannot see the light of truth. We have to pray those blinders off. We have to pray their spiritual receptors will be opened.

[Application] - How about we agree together...to keep a short list in our minds or prayer journals of folks in our orbit of life who need Jesus. Last week I invited you to ask God to bring to your mind names or faces of those he wanted you to practice CPR on...Caring, Praying, and Reaching. Can you picture their faces right now. Let's agree to pray for them regularly if not daily...because 25% of the time Satan never even gives them a chance to connect with Jesus.

[Transition] - Now, verses 13-14 of the parable tells us that half the time (50%), though the word about Jesus is initially heard, initially considered and begins to be embraced...a lack of rootedness, life distractions or worry choke it out before it can be effective and productive in the person's life. Read verses 13-14.

The wording here indicates that in each case something good was beginning to germinate in the person. Some even welcomed the news of Jesus with joy, but before it begins to take root and produce fruit in a person's life all sorts of storms of persecution and trouble come, or they get distracted by materialism and stop pursuing it. Or in some cases, the affliction comes, and they are disillusioned, and upset because they thought bad things were not supposed to happen to spiritual people.

Too many times storms hit folks who are not yet rooted and instead of making the choice to draw near to God in the storm, they push away from him.

This fifty percent failure rate emphasizes the importance of providing solid growth opportunities for people to stay engaged with their spiritual pursuits and growth...to deepen their knowledge of God, their trust in God and their love for God.

This is why two thirds of our purpose as a church is to help people **grow** to love Jesus. We exist to connect people with Jesus...and help them grow to love and serve him. That last two thirds are designed to focus on getting people rooted and established.

- This is why Sunday morning worship gatherings are so crucial. This is why all our Sunday morning Sundays school options are available for all ages.
- This is why our AWANA ministry is so crucial. It helps kids hear, embrace and root deep in Jesus.
- This is why our Junior and Senior Midweek gatherings are centered around small groups.

- If you're an adult, this is why we encourage you regularly to get involved in a mid-week small group, or a Women's Bible Study group or a Men's midweek group or a Celebrate Recovery gathering. The fact of the matter is people grow best in small group.

The 50% failure rate is a bold reminder of how important these growth opportunities are. And what's more, it reinforces how valuable those of you who **serve** to make them happen, are.

Your volunteer service in various ministries of the church **enables us to continue to fulfill our calling as a church to connect people to Jesus and help them grow to love and serve him** so that others can in turn connect, be grown and serve...and so on and so on—this is how followers of Jesus are multiplied.

Conclusion: Despite the difficulties and the challenges of sowing the seed and despite the resistances that come against the productive growth of the seed...the last line of this parable assures us that **all the effort to connect, grow and serve is totally worth it...**because there are people who hear the news about Jesus...accept it...grow and produce a good crop...according to Matthew's conclusion of this parable...a crop thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown. The fruit of our labors is worth it guys!!!

Response time:

Now, as we enter into our fall ministry season many of the opportunities for connection, growth and service are once again revving up. I want to encourage you to be praying and sowing seeds.

And today I want us to respond to this parable by joining together as a church body **and praying** for what God has called us to once again this year.

If you are comfortable doing so, I'd like you to circle up with those close to you and spend a few moments in prayer...if you do not want to do that

this morning, that's totally okay...you can pray where you are on your own.

But, if you are willing, circle up with a few others near you and pray for two things:

1. **F**or the names of those who God has brought to your mind to for CPR - care, pray, and reach. These are the ones God is prompting you to cast seed to in this season.
2. And **second**, pray for all the various ministries starting up this fall around Foothills Church. Pray for whatever ministries come to mind for those in your huddle.

We'll spend a few moments in prayer.