



Shallow Soil
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The Crossing Church
Las Vegas, Nevada

OPENING

This week we are continuing our series called **DIRT**. The complete series Scripture is **Mark 4:1-20** which is called the **Parable of the Soils or Sower or the Seed**. It is about four types of soil which represent the condition of our hearts. In each of the weeks we will unpack one of the four - this week's is called **Shallow Soil**. We are talking about the best conditions for things to grow spiritually as well as identifying conditions that can hinder that growth and even prevent it. The soil of our hearts will determine the growth of our lives.

SCRIPTURE¹

Mark 4:1 Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge.

Mark 4:13-19 (The Message) Do you see how this story works? All my stories work this way. The farmer plants the Word. Some people are like the seed that falls on the hardened soil of the road. No sooner do they hear the Word than Satan snatches away what has been planted in them. And some are like the seed that lands in the gravel. When they first hear the Word, they respond with great enthusiasm. But there is such shallow soil of character that when the emotions wear off and some difficulty arrives, there is nothing to show for it. The seed cast in the weeds represents the ones who hear the kingdom news but are overwhelmed with worries about all the things they have to do and all the things they want to get. The stress strangles what they heard, and nothing comes of it.

James 1:3 You know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Matthew 7:24-27 Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down and the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the streams rose and the winds blew and beat against the house and it fell with a great crash.

John 16:33 I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart because I have overcome the world.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture referenced here is NIV

OBSERVATION

Jesus loved to teach in parables. In fact, He told 36 different ones and this one we are studying this week in Matthew, Mark and Luke's gospels. CH Dodd was pretty precise in his definition when he said a parable is "a metaphor or simile drawn from nature of common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought." (CH Dodd) That's deep. Jesus told this story in an agrarian setting where His audience well understood what four types of soil were like. He may have told it while watching a farmer sow seed in his field. The point of story is that God sows His Word in the soil of our hearts. When the soil is shallow and where the roots cannot grow deep, there is no foundation to support the growth.

QUESTION: What is the condition of your heart today? Do you recognize characteristics of a shallow soil there?

APPLICATION

In the parable, one of the places Jesus says that the seed lands in is filled with small rocks or gravel. One translation actually uses the word, "sandy." It's unstable. It's shallow. It's lacking the proper amount of soil. It lacks an efficient root system to grow, so it's not great - healthy or sustainable. Jesus says our hearts can be the same way. We begin with a small amount of faith, but if it fails to extend deeper into our lives, if it fails to "take root" when the "heat of life" shows up (which it will), faith withers and we are not be able to endure. We tend to always celebrate beginnings but undervalue sustainability and consistency. We get excited about an idea, a new this, a new that, but often find it difficult to actually follow through. We've probably met people who have an enduring kind of faith. We've also met people who are going through really difficult times. Those moments where the scorching heat of life threatens to wither their faith away, it continues to thrive and is "rock solid." Their confidence in God is clearly sustaining them, and we want that, too, don't we? It's that enduring faith - that makes us stronger and deeper. If anyone is telling us what they believe without acknowledging the trials they've been through, don't really know what they believe. "A faith that can't be tested, can't be trusted." (Greg Laurie)

QUESTION: When has your faith been tested? How did you respond?

Under the banner of what we believe, our hearts may still be following something else. The embattled rather than enduring type of response is reflective of shallow dirt in our lives. Because, despite what we believe, when life gets hot, issues heat up, we quickly revert to our fallenness, revealing our lack of spiritual depth. Interestingly, Jesus never said, "Believe in Me." He said, "Follow Me." His invitation was to go in a different direction, live a unique life. Believing doesn't require change while following means everything changes.

QUESTION: How should you live today that reflects your resolve to follow Jesus?

How we answer that question when life is bad and out of control determines whether our faith flourishes or withers. So, let's talk sun and rain. Jesus doesn't mention them in the context of this parable, but we know that sun and rain are important components of the sowing process that help crops thrive and produce fruit. They make the root system develop, bringing strength and health, but lack of depth causes the sun to burn and the rain to overpower growth. Yet no rain equals no growth and no sun equals no harvest. Rain represents trials in our lives – divorces, prodigal kids, health problems – we all have them in some form or other. These downpours bring revelations of the strength of our faith – the depth of commitment to Christ – they reveal what's beneath the surface. Deep rain produces important growth in our lives. It reveals whether we've built our lives on rock or sand.

QUESTION: When have trials strengthened your faith? When have they caused you to falter?

We often waste the rain that comes in all of our lives. We don't see it as a positive in our walks with Christ, but it reveals that our lives need to be built on something solid and enduring. We need roots that go deep and anchor us during difficult times.

QUESTION: In what ways have you built your life on a firm foundation?

QUESTION: In what ways do you regret building your life on sand?

If our hearts are not producing God's fruit, we need to revitalize the soil. It needs nutrients through composting and fertilizing; it needs introduction of loam or good soil to bring it to life; it needs irrigation – and rain.

QUESTION: What are you going to do to deepen the soil that represents your heart's condition?

God gives us hope and purpose. Life may have rainy days but God has planted seeds of faith in us for such times. This season is uncertain, inconvenient, and discouraging, but we can't give way under its pressure. We can look forward to the time when God reveals all things to us and we can celebrate together.

QUESTION: As our Fall season begins at The Crossing, what plans do you have to join in fellowship and to serve here?

QUESTION: If you haven't life issues that prevent your involvement at this time, could it be that your commitment to God is coming from a shallow heart?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, when we live without total commitment to You and the purpose You have for our lives, our hearts are like shallow soil where no growth takes place – only apathy and lazy spirituality reside there. Help us to cultivate a rich soil, full of nutrients made up of Your Word, compassion and wisdom - where we can be fruitful members of Your Kingdom. In Jesus' name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

QUESTION: What is the condition of your heart today? Do you recognize characteristics of a shallow soil there?

QUESTION: When has your faith been tested? How did you respond?

QUESTION: How should you live today that reflects your resolve to follow Jesus?

QUESTION: When have trials strengthened your faith? When have they caused you to falter?

QUESTION: In what ways have you built your life on a firm foundation?

QUESTION: In what ways do you regret building your life on sand?

QUESTION: What are you going to do to deepen the soil that represents your heart's condition?

QUESTION: As our Fall season begins at The Crossing, what plans do you have to join in fellowship and to serve here?

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