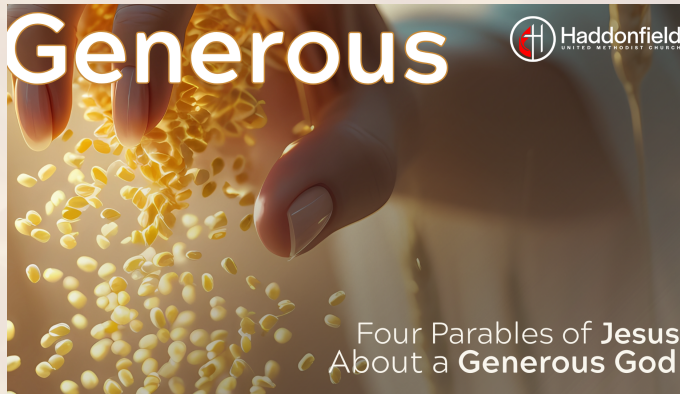




Matthew 13:1-9 (NRSV)

¹That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears listen!"

Matthew 5:45 (NRSV)

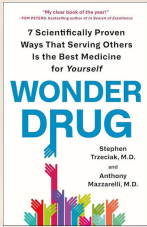
⁴⁵so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

Opening

- Pray:** Gracious and Loving God, open our hearts and minds as we gather together today. Teach us to trust in your abundant love and to rest in the assurance of your extravagant grace. Guide our conversation so that we may grow in generosity toward one another and reflect your light in our community. Amen.
- Share:** What is one small, simple gesture someone did for you recently that made you smile or feel cared for?

Dive Into the Text

- In the Parable of the Sower, the sower scatters seed indiscriminately across hard paths, rocky ground, thorn patches, and fertile soil. Why might this method of farming have seemed unusual or inefficient to Jesus' original audience?
- In Matthew 5:45, Jesus notes that God causes the sun to rise and the rain to fall on both the good and the evil. What does this reveal about how God views and dispenses grace?
- Looking at the different types of soil in Matthew 13, what cultural or personal "thorns" and "rocky ground" often prevent people from fully receiving God's word and growing in their faith?



Wonder Drug: 7 Scientifically Proven Ways That Serving Others Is the Best Medicine for Yourself

Read the quote from Stephen Trzeciak, M.D. and Anthony Mazzairelli, M.D.'s book

and then answer the Go Deeper questions.

By the turn of the century, with the widespread use of the internet and social media, we took to posting incessantly about our lunch, creating YouTube channels, and uploading a million selfies. Me Culture evolved again to take on a holistic, mindfulness bent by "living your best life," and "following your passion." "Self-Care" has been elevated as the panacea for whatever ails us. The influencers and soul patrol espoused that by forever working on ourselves, we'd find happiness.

Every generation has its version of "I'm doing me." We have been immersed in Me Culture, in its various permutations, for 50 years, doubling and tripling down on all-about-me-ism. And that'd be swell, if the scientific data showed that it had any health benefit.

The truth is, it's not all about you. It never has been. And by fixating on ourselves, we can actually harm ourselves. Self-serving culture has trained us to look out for ourselves first and screw everyone else. But this attitude has left us feeling alone and empty, and it has triggered an anxiety epidemic. Research has found that the more people focus solely on themselves, the worse off they may be in almost every metric that can be measured: physical and mental health, emotional well-being, and professional success.

Trzeciak, Anthony, and Stephen Mazzairelli. *Wonder Drug: 7 Scientific Proofs That Serving Others Is the Secret to a Longer, Healthier, Happier Life*. St. Martin's Press, 2022.

Go Deeper

1. How do you see modern "Me Culture" or the pressure to "live your best life" affecting your own daily habits and stress levels?
2. In what ways do you find balance between self-care and fear-based self-focus that can lead to selfishness? Is this something you struggle with?
3. What is one specific way you can intentionally shift your focus away from yourself this week to be generous to others with your time, resources, presence, and actions?

Close in Prayer

Close your time in prayer together.