

The third type of ground is recorded in Matthew 13:7 and Luke 8:7.

Matthew 13:7:
and some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:

Luke 8:7:
and some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up with it, and choked it.

The interpretation is in Matthew 13:22 and Luke 8:14.

Matthew 13:22:
He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word and the care of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word and he becometh unfruitful.

Luke 8:14:
and that which fell among thorns are they, which when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

The Greek words for "sprung up" in Matthew and "sprang up" in Luke are different but each connotes a growth over a period of time, not an immediate action.

The words "choked" have the same root in both Gospels. They are from the word pnigo which carries a much broader definition than "choke" or "strangle." In Luke 8:33, the swine "ran down a steep place into the lake and were choked [drowned]." In Luke 8:42, "But as he went the people thronged him." They didn't choke him. They pressed in on him tightly. The word smothered would be an accurate word to use here. They were not trying to kill him; they were just trying to get close to him. To choke, smother or drown is a good general definition for the word pnigo.¹⁰

From the parable, we see that the seeds of the thorns were there

¹⁰ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard, eds. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 10 vols., trans and ed. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964-76), s.v. pnigo.

before the Word was heard. They grew up with the seed that was sown and smothered it.

The word for "care" is the word merimna. It is the same word used in I Peter 5:7, "casting all your care upon him." It is from the word merizo, which means divided, which is from the word meros, which means parts or portion. The word merimnao has as its root our original word merimna. Merimnao means "thought" as in Matthew 6:25, "take no thought for your life." From this we can see that merimna, which was translated "cares" could have been translated "divided thoughts." Divided thoughts came from distractions. The word for "life" in Luke is the word bios. It refers to the physical aspects of life, like food and material possessions.¹¹ These are things along with "riches and pleasures" that can divide thoughts and be distractions. "Riches" and "pleasures" simply mean fullness and pleasant things. They are not actually negative words.

The word for "deceitfulness," apatee, is used in conjunction with "lusts" in Ephesians 4:22 and "vain" in Ephesians 5:6. "Lusts" meaning over-desire and "vain" or vanity meaning empty, connected with the word deceitfulness show us the emptiness of over-desiring riches. It's not the riches but the over-desire which is distracting. The result in Matthew is that "he becometh unfruitful."

In Luke the words "bring no fruit to perfection" are wrong. The Greek says "he does not come to perfection." The parable is not concerned about bringing fruit to perfection; it is concerned with the man's ability to bear fruit. He did in fact bear some fruit.

¹¹H.K. Moulton, The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), s.v. "bios."

This man in Luke 8:14 took action and did "go forth." He was moving on the Word and was not blown off by mental and physical pressure. He was moving on the Word for a period of time. Thorns do not grow instantly. So while these cares and lusts are growing in his life he is not being distracted enough to get off of the Word. But as the cares and lusts get larger in his mind, he is pulled off the Word, and does not come to perfection. Look at I Timothy 6:9 and 10a.

I Timothy 6:9 and 10a:

But they that will [desire to] be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

For the love of money is the root of all evil:

His gradual move off the Word is done in steps of compromise and rationalization. He always thinks he is right and is still on the Word; as in Proverbs 12:15a, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes." The Word is slowly choked and he does not come to perfection.

Good Ground

Finally in this paper we come to good ground.

Matthew 13:8:

But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixty fold, some thirtyfold.

Luke 8:8:

...and other fell on good ground and sprang up, and bear fruit an hundred fold.

The interpretation:

Matthew 13:23:

But he that receiveth seed into good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Luke 8:15:

But that on the good ground are they which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it and bring forth fruit with patience.

There is very little information in the parable which will tell us what the good ground is. All we know is that it's not any of the three types of soil spoken of before. But the interpretation of the parable is rich in information describing the characteristics of good ground.

First in Matthew it says, "he that heareth the word..." All four types of ground heard [akouo] the Word. This man "understandeth it." But the men characterized by "stony places" and "among the thorns" also understood it. This man "beareth fruit." The words for "beareth fruit" are harpop horeo which mean to carry or bear fruit. The man "among the thorns" also produced some fruit before he gave in to compromise. That completes the key words from the parable in Matthew without seeing the ingredients exclusive to good ground. The Gospel of Mark does not yield any more information.

In Luke, we find some different characteristics which will complete the picture of good ground. The words "honest and good" are worth looking at. The word "honest" is translated "good" normally. It means good as in "this is a good car" or "he is a good worker." The English word "good" is understood. The word "good," in the interpretation, is the Greek word agathos. It means the opposite of evil. In almost every instance it is used to contrast evil. Matthew 5:45, "to rise on the evil and the good;" Matthew 7:18, "A good tree cannot bring forth evil"; Matthew 20:15, "Is thine eye evil, because I am good?"; Romans 3:8, "Let us do evil that good may come?" These are some of the verses which show this very clearly. The heart of good ground is good and is the opposite of evil.

The man also "having heard^d the word, keep it." The word for "keep" is kateko. It means seize. Matthew 21:38, "let us seize on his inheritance" is the first usage. It could be translated "hold in a

firm grasp."¹²

In contrast to the man "by the wayside" who receives the Word in (en--inside) his heart and allows it to be taken out (apo--from the surface) of his heart, this man "holds in a firm grasp" the Word in his heart. The man hears the Word and acts upon it. Seeing its value, he commits himself to stay on it and not let it go. Then he "bring forth fruit," carries fruit, produces fruit with action. "With patience" he brings forth fruit. The word "patience" is hupomonee, which means "to remain behind when others have departed."¹³ He is faithful to his commitment to the Word. He does not drop it or compromise.

Conclusion

For those "by the wayside," the Word is heard and it gets into their hearts. But they do not act on it because they do not understand it. Therefore, they lose it. Those that "receive the Word into stony places," hear the Word and get very excited about it, but because they have no root in themselves, no internal staying power, when a little pressure comes they leave, and the Word withers. Those "among the thorns" remain on the Word for a period of time. They grow in the Word and see results. But the seeds of lusts and vain desires for riches and pleasures finally mature. When they do, they smother the Word. The man compromises his position and ends up with the Word in his life choked. Those characterized as "good ground" hear the Word and understand it. Their ears are not dull of hearing and their hearts are not unfeeling. They seize upon the Word and keep it in their hearts. Their

¹²Moulton Greek Lexicon, s.v. "kateko."

¹³Moulton, Greek Lexicon, s.v. "hupomonee."

hearts are good, they are the opposite of evil. They produce fruit by their own decision and action, by continued endurance in spite of pressure and in spite of lusts and pleasures trying to pull them into a compromised position.

These are the types of people the Word is spoken to and these are the responses to the Word. Now it is up to the leader to take this knowledge and help the individuals he is responsible for to rise up to their fullest potential. For those who want to grow and bear fruit, the decision to do so is the first requirement. If they will decide they want fruit, the leader can help them no matter what type of ground they are.

Chapter Three

LEADERSHIP POSITION

A knowledge of the parable, as shown in the preceeding chapter, plus a knowledge of the individual a leader has to work with will enable the leader to localize specific problem areas and address them with great effectiveness.

When working with a person who can be characterized as "by the wayside" the leader is going to have to show the person the need in his life plus the solution to the need and then motivate him to take action. If the individual does not take action, the process will have to be repeated. Painting word pictures of deliverance is a very effective way to help get through an insensitive heart. Constant follow-up will be required to make sure a course of action was started and is continuing.

I worked with a man who had financial problems. For months I talked to him about how to resolve his financial problem. He never took action so he never saw the results. Finally I sat him down and spent three hours helping him write a budget plan and teaching him how to use it. I checked with him every after that to make sure he was following the plan. Within one month he saw concrete signs of deliverance. He learned more about stewardship, honesty and giving than he had in the previous five years since he took the foundational class.

To work with a person characterized as "stony places" requires actions which are the next logical step from working with those "by the wayside". As in the example above I followed up, I checked with him every day. There was mental pressure to him. He had to record every cent that

he spent, which is not an easy task. He had to make sure that he gave of his salary, 10% minimum. He wanted to quit because he was not accustomed to the discipline required and the results were not immediate. The very act of what he did helped to build the discipline in his life needed to carry on. The positive results showed him that discipline is freedom. When working with people such as this, the leader will have to stay close to help them through the pressure times. When the results (the fruit) come through they will have built the ability to stand stronger some other time.

As should be obvious though, the individual is ultimately responsible. He has freedom of will. The leader can only go as far as he is allowed to go.

Working with those characterized as "among the thorns" is the next logical step progressively above those in "stony places". These people will not be blown off by pressure, but they will be pulled off by pleasure. Direct teaching is the most effective method of dealing with this problem. When someone is pulled off the Word and they still think they are right in their actions, they are getting into doctrinal error. Direct confrontation will probably be needed to get them back on the Word. There is nothing wrong with money or pleasures, it's just when they start replacing God that the action is wrong.

People can't be put into a box and characterized as type "A", "B" or "C". Traces of any of the four types of soil can be found in any person. Leaders must work with individuals on an individual basis on an individual need.

Biblical Examples

Examples of the various types of ground are found in the Word. A good example of "rocky ground" is found in King Saul in I Samuel. In

I Samuel 10:8, Samuel instructs Saul to wait seven days, at which time Samuel would come to Gilgal and offer burnt offerings. In the mean time the Philistines come up to battle against Israel. Under the pressure of the situation Saul does the burnt offering without Samuel. He broke down under the mental pressure of the time. He demonstrated in this example that he had "no root in himself".

In I Samuel 15:1, Saul is told to kill every person and beast among the Amalekites. Saul's army attacked the Amalekites, but brought back the best of the livestock. They also brought back the king alive. When Samuel confronted him, he made excuses as to why he did not obey. This would be an example of the Word being "sown among the thorns". The deceitfulness of riches and the pleasures of life choked the Word. It's also an example of "stony places" because he gave into the pressure from the people.

Conclusion

For further study I recommend character studies of Biblical figures to identify the four types of soil in various situations. I also recommend that individuals trained in motivational techniques and experienced leaders show how to most effectively work with the four types of people to bring them to their fullest capacity.

Our vision is Word Over the World. When people are excited about God the Word will move. If people are not seeing fruit in their lives they will not be excited, they will be confused. Leadership is responsible to help them come from being confused to being fruitful.

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An Interpretation Of The Ground In The Parable Of The Sower And The Seed

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Action
Dicipline

The Parable of the Sower and the Seed is not understood in light of using it to help people bear fruit in their lives.

The entire parable is studied to show the characteristics of people who have difficulty seeing the results of the Word in their lives. It also shows the characteristics of those who do see the results of the Word in their lives

Those "by the wayside" do not take action on the Word they have heard. Those on "stony places" do start to take action but stop when the pressure comes along. Those "among the thorns" can deal with the pressure but are pulled off the Word by cares of the world and deceitfulness of riches. Those on "good ground" bear fruit by continued action on the Word in spite of pressure or pleasure.

Today's leadership can use this information to help those who are having difficulty bearing fruit in their lives.