

Fundamentals Of Spiritual Growth

Scripture settings for this study: **1 Corinthians 3:6; Luke 8:4-15; James 5:7-8**

- In the gospel according to Luke 8:4-15 the Lord told the Parable of the Sower which gives insight and understanding into Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 3:6. Read also the words of Jesus from Luke 8:4-15.

Paul gives us three simple points concerning the fundamentals of spiritual growth.

First -- The Planting

1 Corinthians 3:6a says, *"I have planted ..."*

The preparation of the seed and the soil is important. For anything to grow there must be good seed and good soil for the seed to grow in.

Characteristics of the seed:

Luke 8:11 says, *"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God."*

The seed is the Word of God, and like seed, the Word has life and power. Note: Nothing can take the place of the Word of God.

Hebrews 4:12 says, *"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*

The Epistle to the Hebrews is difficult to translate because so much of the content concerns the Jewish culture and religious rituals. Much of those concepts are totally foreign to the Agta people who live in the northern Philippines. However, some parts of the epistle really make sense to them, like the verse in Hebrews 4:12, **"The**

Word of God is living and potent." Depending upon the context, the Agta word madagat can mean stinging, venomous, or potent. A poisonous snake is madagat, but so are some medicines that can heal. One translation assistant explained his understanding of how the Word of God is potent this way:

"It depends upon how we approach it. If we disregard it, it's like the poisonous snake. But if we live by it, its potency is like medicine."

-- James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 44.

The seed produces the fruit. The Word, like the seed, will produce results in us. Galatians 5:22-23 says, "**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.**"

The Bible was not given to increase our knowledge but to change our lives.

The seed can do nothing until it is planted. John 12:24 says, "**Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.**"

Jesus said to certain in Israel in **John 8:37**, "***I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you.***"

These refused to be planted. We all have the potential to receive but if we refuse to allow the seed to be planted in our heart then nothing will ever happen in our life.

Notice the characteristics of the seeds nature:

It will produce results even after long periods of time. (Isaiah 55:8-13)

Some years ago a lotus seed was germinated after lying dormant for several thousand years in a peat bog. Human beings don't live that long. But they do have a remarkable power to respond to seeds of spiritual life sown years before. Isaiah states, "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth:

It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:10-11).

It stands forever.

Isaiah 40:7-8 says, *"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. 8The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever."*

Characteristics of the soil (Luke 8:5-8; 12-15):

Jesus described four different kinds of soil, three of which did not produce any fruit:

■ **The hard soil (vv. 5, 12) -**

This soil represents the person who hears the Word but immediately allows the devil to snatch the seed away.

The question needs to be asked "How did the soil become hard" The "wayside" was the path that ran through the common field, separating the plots; and the foot traffic hardened the soil. The caution to us is: Be careful who/what is allowed to "walk on your heart."

■ **The shallow soil (vv. 6, 13) -**

This soil illustrates the emotional hearer who quickly responds to the message, but his interest wanes and he does not

continue. In many parts of the Holy Land you find a substratum of limestone covered with a thin layer of soil. The shoot can grow up, but the roots cannot go down, and the sun withers the rootless plant.

■ **The crowded soil (vv. 7, 14) -**

This soil illustrates the person who does not repent and "weed out" the things that hinder the harvest. There is enough soil so the roots can go down, but not enough room for the plant to grow up and produce fruit. The plant is crowded out and the fruit is choked. "Cares, riches, and the pleasures of this life" are like weeds in a garden that keep the soil from being fruitful. The person with the "crowded heart" comes closest to salvation, but he still does not bring forth fruit to perfection.?

■ **The good soil (vv. 8, 15) -**

This soil alone is fruitful. It illustrates the individual who hears the Word, understands it, receives it within, and patiently produces fruit.

When a person hears and understands the Word, then the seed is planted in the heart. What happens after that depends on the nature of the soil. The seed without the soil is fruitless, and the soil without the seed is almost useless.

What is the soil compared to: The heart of man. If it is prepared properly, it can receive the seed of the Word of God and produce a fruitful harvest.

Hosea 10:12 says, "*Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.*"

Second -- The Watering

1 Corinthians 3:6b says, "*Apollos watered ...*"

Luke 8:6 says, "*And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.*"

Planted seeds will die if there is a lack of water. Take special note of the phrase in Luke 8:6, "... *it withered away, because it lacked moisture.*"

The Spirit is described in many different ways in Scripture. Romans 8:2 says, "*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*"

"the Spirit of Life."

- One of the descriptions that is given to the Holy Ghost is that of water.
- The Holy Ghost is the life giving water that we need to bring life to the seed of God's Word planted in our heart.
- Water makes the root possible. The seed cannot germinate without it. Only the ministry of the Spirit can keep the soil of the heart moist with tenderness. The Spirit is the mighty germinator of the Word of God. The ministry of the Holy Ghost is vital to spiritual life.
- Jesus made this plain in John 7:37 when He said, "*If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.*"
- The flow of this life giving water is vital. Unless the seed is watered it will not multiply. There is one condition that keeps this life giving water flowing in my life:
- Worship is vital to the free flow of the Spirit in our lives. There must be times when the Spirit is allowed to water the soil of our heart and the seed planted by God's Word must be allowed to germinate in our heart so that we can bring forth fruit. (John 4:21-24)

Third -- The Increase

1 Corinthians 3:6c says, "...but God gave the increase."

Luke 8:15 says, "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."

James 5:7-8 says, "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. 8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

Between the planting and the increase there is one factor that we must consider: patience. Anything that God does for us of eternal value requires patience.

The person who looks for quick results in the seed planting of well-doing will be disappointed. If I want potatoes for dinner tomorrow, it will do me little good to plant them in my garden tonight. There are long stretches of darkness and invisibility and silence that separate planting and reaping. During the stretches of waiting, there is cultivating and weeding and nurturing and planting still other seeds.

The words of Jesus in Luke 8:15 and the words of the apostle James in 5:7-8 demonstrate for us what patience really is. It describes action.

The farmer is a good example of the kind of patient waiting believers must have as they wait for the increase to come. The farmer plants his seed and patiently waits for the early rain to germinate the seed and the latter rain to ripen the crop. The farmer looks forward to the day of harvest with great expectation - so much so that he does all he can to protect the day of increase. He combats the trials of dry and wet weather, insects and disease, and the wild weeds and briars. No

matter what confronts him the farmer patiently endures and combats it every step of the way because his eyes are fixed upon the great day of harvest.