

MESSAGE 1:

THE SECRET OF THE SEED

SUGGESTED PASSAGE: Luke 8:4-11 (NASB)

⁴ When a large crowd was coming together, and those from the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable: ⁵ "The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and it was trampled under foot and the birds of the air ate it up. ⁶ Other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. ⁷ Other seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out. ⁸ Other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great." As He said these things, He would call out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." ⁹ His disciples began questioning Him as to what this parable meant. ¹⁰ And He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand. ¹¹ "Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God...."

MESSAGE GOAL: The goal of this message on *The Secret of the Seed* is to explain the importance of the truth that we first receive the gospel message in seed form, packed with all the potential of God's Word, and to show that the way we receive the Word can set the tone, for good or for ill, in our spiritual lives and growth in our walk with the Lord.

INTRODUCTION: The Indiana Jones series of films were very exciting because this adventurous and brave archeologist would spend time in search of valuable artifacts, many times going through great danger in order to find the great treasure he was searching for.

Jesus spoke of a treasure He called "the mysteries of the kingdom." He also said this is such an unusual treasure that should not allow anything to get in the way of our discovering it for ourselves. The word "kingdom" means rule. The biblical term used here refers to the doctrine of eschatology, which means "the last word" or "the last things," a reference to the Bible's teaching about the end-times.

More specifically in this passage, Jesus' reference to the kingdom points toward His millennial kingdom, His future reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. The Bible talks quite a bit about

when Jesus Christ will return and rule the entire earth from Jerusalem for this period of one thousand years. In the meantime, Jesus set forth during His earthly life several kingdom principles that apply to us as His followers today.

Jesus set forth these principles as a mystery, which in the Bible is not a brainteaser or something hard to figure out, but something that was not previously understood or revealed which has now been revealed or explained. These principles needed to be understood by Jesus' disciples in His day, and by us today if we are going to understand the uniqueness of this treasure that He called the kingdom.

Jesus often taught truth by means of a parable, a story that uses something familiar to the hearers to explain something that is not familiar to them. One of Jesus' most famous parables is that of the sower and the seed. It is riveting in its truth, and if you discover "the seed principle" it teaches, you will discover a secret that will transform your very existence.

This message is called *The Secret of the Seed* because Jesus wanted His disciples to know that success in the growth of the seed had nothing to do with the seed itself; the success of the seed had everything to do with where it landed.

Many times people will think, even if they don't say it out loud, "God's Word doesn't work. The Word is taught, but nothing's different in my life." Jesus wants us to know this parable so we understand that if nothing is different about us, it's not the problem of the seed. The issue is where the seed falls, which is why we have to check the ground it lands upon.

SERMON POINTS:

1. THE SEED OF THE GOSPEL PROVIDES COMPLETE TRANSFORMATION:

We need transformation in all three parts of our being: body, soul, and spirit

- The soul is the self-life, your personhood, while your body is your physical life
- We were born with a live body, a damaged soul, and a dead spirit

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- The soul of every human being is messed up and your body obeys your soul
- Sin is what distorts our soul because we were born in sin. In fact, we're born in iniquity.

The gospel seed restores us in all three areas of our lives

- The goal of spiritual transformation is for the spirit to enter into the soul and the soul to reinstruct the body
- When you were saved, you got the seed of the gospel planted in your spirit and you were born of the seed (1 Peter 1:23)
- If the body's going to act differently, it is because the soul is being influenced by a seed that's growing; if you're a believer, it is already there (James 1:21)

2. THE WORD OF GOD IS NECESSARY FOR THE GROWTH PROCESS:

Scripture is the tool that is needed to see transformation

- The Word of God is alive, just like a seed
- You don't see the tree, the fruit, or the plant, but it's in the seed
- The seed is alive, but it hasn't been planted in the right spot yet
- The Word has the power to fix up what is messed up in our lives (Hebrews 4:12)

The seed of the Scripture will do its work if the soil is right

- But if we are satisfied with a distorted soul, the Word can't take root in that soil
- Growth is not instant, but a process; the seed is not given to us as a completed process, but for the process of growth (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS:

HUMAN FERTILIZATION AND GROWTH:

When a female egg is fertilized, conception occurs. Life has now happened! However, if that fertilized egg doesn't "land" right—that is, if it doesn't become planted properly in the womb, the life in that egg cannot flourish even though the life is present. In much the same way, when you receive the Word of God, what you're getting is the Word in seed. Everything necessary for growth and full, healthy life is in the seed. But what happens too often is that we come to church and get the seed, but because the soil of our hearts is not conducive to growth, the seed that was just received is not free to express all that it was designed to become. The soil isn't cooperating with the nature of the seed, and the seed does not become what it was designed to become.

THE SOWER/FARMER:

If you were a farmer (or a sower) in Jesus' day, you would carry a large bag of seed on your back and reach in for handfuls as you walked along scattering the seeds in the furrows you had plowed. Those seeds that fell in the prepared soil would take root and grow. But other seeds would fall all over the place because the farmer scattered them with his hand.

Jesus uses this everyday farming process that all of His audience would've understood to tell us about the seed principle that is at work in His kingdom. In Jesus' parable, the seeds fell among different types of soil. Besides the good soil, some seeds also fell on thorny soil, wayside or roadside soil, and shallow soil. What Jesus wants His first disciples and us to know is that while the seed is the same, the place where it landed was very different. When the sower sows the seed, it is not the seed itself but the landing spot that determines whether there is a crop or not.

HAVING EARS BUT NOT HEARING:

In Luke 8:8, Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." There are churches in Africa that provide a wonderful illustration of this seemingly puzzling statement, which referred of course to the fact that people can hear something without letting it really sink in and getting the message.

In these churches, ushers walk up and down the aisles with long sticks while the preacher is preaching. When they see somebody nodding off, they jab that person in the ribs because they don't want anybody sleeping their way through the sermon and not listening. Those ushers are saying by their jabs, "You've got ears, but you're not listening. Wake up!"

BACKGROUND BIBLICAL HISTORY AND CULTURE:

MYSTERY:

The Bible's definition of a mystery is far different than its meaning in everyday language. We think of a mystery as a puzzle to be put together, a riddle to be solved or a knot to be untied. But a biblical mystery is none of these; instead, it is a truth that was previously hidden or not understood that God has now revealed and explained. Jesus called the truths of His kingdom a mystery because the full understanding of the kingdom had not been made known to God's people before Jesus came and explained it.

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PARABLE:

The word “parable” comes from a Greek term that means to place two things side by side for the purpose of comparison. The use of parables goes back to Old Testament times (see 2 Samuel 12:1-14; Isaiah 5:1-7), and they are also present in Jewish rabbinical writings. Jesus used parables extensively in His teaching, often to help His hearers understand a truth about His kingdom that had previously been hidden—a mystery. Thus, a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning—a story that takes something ordinary and familiar, to explain a concept that is unfamiliar.

SYNOPTIC GOSPELS:

This term is used for the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke because they provide a synopsis, or summary, of Jesus’ earthly life and ministry. The Gospel of John is not included in this term because instead of taking his readers through Jesus’ earthly life, John chose seven specific “signs” by which to prove that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Therefore, John does not include many of the words and deeds of Jesus that the other three Gospels include.

SERMON LINES:

This message will help you introduce Jesus’ critically important parable of the sower and the seed, which contains vital principles concerning the way His kingdom operates on earth.

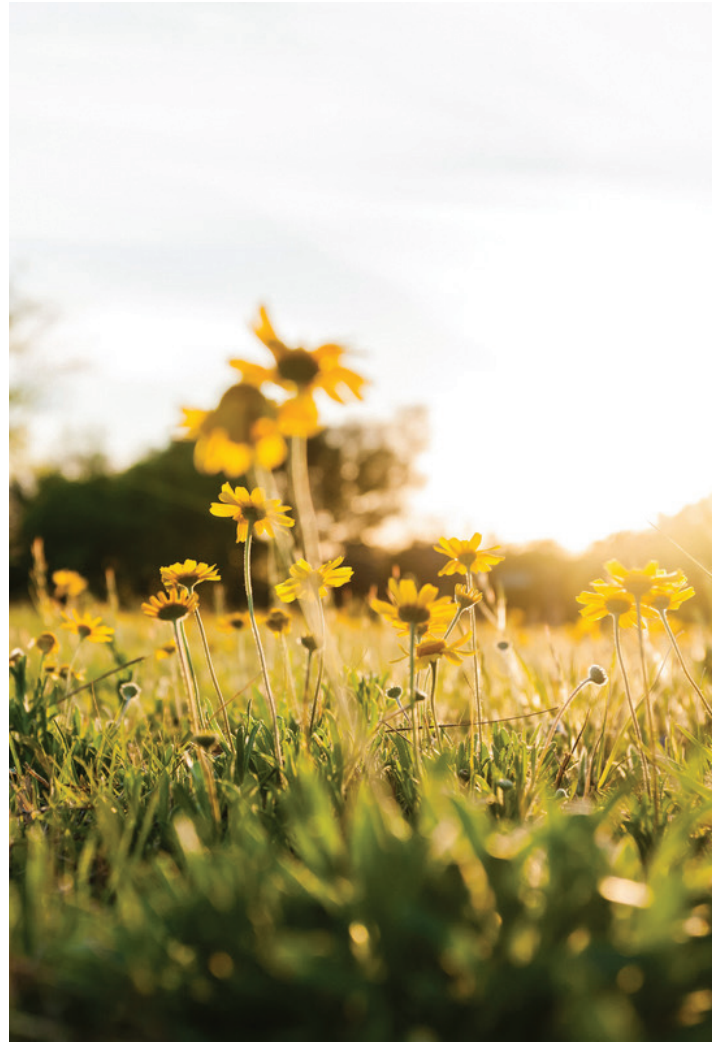
This message also focuses attention on our need to ensure that our hearts and lives are well prepared by the Holy Spirit to receive the life-giving seed of God’s Word—for it is the quality of the soil, not of the seed, that determines our spiritual growth or the lack thereof.

QUOTES BY DR. TONY EVANS:

“If God’s Word is not working, you need to check the ground it landed on, because there is nothing wrong with the seed.”

“Hearing the Bible preached is like eating an appetizer. Once you hear the sermon, no matter how much you liked it or enjoyed it, all you got was the appetizer. The full meal comes when you take the Word you have heard and process it, digest it, and put it to use in your daily life.”

“There is nothing wrong with the seed because the seed is the Word of God and therefore the Word of God is perfect. The damage is in the soil.”



MESSAGE 2:

THE ENEMY OF THE SEED

SUGGESTED PASSAGE: Luke 8:4-12 (NASB)

⁴ When a large crowd was coming together, and those from the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable: ⁵ "The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and it was trampled underfoot and the birds of the air ate it up. ⁶ Other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. ⁷ Other seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out. ⁸ Other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great." As He said these things, He would call out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." ⁹ His disciples began questioning Him as to what this parable meant. ¹⁰ And He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand. ¹¹ "Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. ¹² Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved."

MESSAGE GOAL: The goal of this message on *The Enemy of the Seed* is to identify the tactics used by Satan to hinder the spiritual growth and transformation of the soul God wants to occur, even in the seed of the gospel message that has been sown in the "wayside" soil of the human soul.

INTRODUCTION: If your vision is distorted, everything you see is unclear. If things are unclear, you need something to clarify what you're seeing. You need assistance with your vision so that you can see things clearly. You may not realize that things are unclear until you put glasses on and begin to see things clearly for perhaps the first time.

Jesus' parable in Luke 8 makes it inextricably clear that in order for the Word of God to do its work in our lives, the soil of our hearts must be ready to receive it. The seed is flawless, but if the soil is not conducive to its growth, the person will never see what the seed was designed to accomplish.

We are made up of three parts: body, soul, and spirit. Your spirit is that part of you that allows you to communicate with

God. It is the signal that allows you to enter into the unseen spiritual realm in which God operates. If you are living in defeat and not living in victory, the parable makes it clear that the problem is with your soil, your spiritual receiver, so to speak. Everything that the seed is designed to become is resident within it, but it must have the right location to grow.

In verse 12, Jesus introduced us to Satan, our archenemy, who is standing ready to snatch away the seed of the gospel that was sown so that the person goes nowhere spiritually. Satan knows that if the Word of God ever gets implanted in the right soil, he can't stop it. So he wants to keep the Word from getting to where God wants it to go. Satan's job is to keep the seed of the Word from germinating. Jesus said Satan does this by taking away the seed sown on the soil by the road or wayside.

Wayside soil was not ground the farmer plowed and prepared for the seed. It was where people walked, the hard, densely packed earth along the road or well-worn path. The difference between the good soil and the wayside soil is the difference between your lawn and your sidewalk. The sidewalk is far too hard for good seed to grow in it. In Jesus' parable, this soil represents people whose hearts and souls are hardened and unreceptive to the seed of God's Word. These people may be exposed to the Word, even on a regular basis. They are those who hear but don't listen—who hear, but don't care.

When Mark tells this story in Mark 4, he adds that when Satan comes and takes the Word from a hardened heart, he does it "immediately." The reason Satan needs to move in quickly is to get the seed before there is a change in the soil. He does not want this soil to become soft, because if the soil becomes soft, it might open up to the seed. He must get the seed while it is on the wayside.

If Satan didn't get to you in time because you're saved, then he wants to keep the seed that has been sown in your spirit from growing into a mature, victorious life.

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SERMON POINTS:

1. IF WE DO NOT USE IT, WE WILL LOSE IT:

The seed of God's Word must be cultivated or it will be snatched away by Satan

- A hardened soul and refusal to hear God's point of view makes a person worse off than if he had never heard it at all
- When there is no growth due to hardness, what little the hardened person has will be taken away

It is possible even for saved people to become hardened and allow Satan to steal the seed

- It is possible for someone to hear God's Word and yet regress spiritually (James 1:21)
- The devil wants to keep the seed of God's Word from taking root in the soil (John 10:10)

2. THE GROWTH PROCESS REQUIRES TIME AND PATIENCE:

All truth comes to us in seed form

- When we hear God's Word, we are hearing it in a way that is not yet developed
- In order for the seed to become developed, there must be a growth process; we cannot get the product of spiritual maturity without going through the process

3. WE NEED TO REACH CHILDREN WHILE THEY ARE YOUNG AND OPEN TO CHRIST:

We need to be diligent in instilling God's Word in young hearts

- This is why parents should seek to lead their children to Christ early
- The secular culture wants to harden children, and will if given enough time

Sometimes we have to pray difficult prayers for those whose hearts have become hard

- To be hard spiritually means to resist God
- When that happens, it means the devil can quickly rein this person in; we need to pray that God will break up the hard soil, which can be painful

SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS:

DISTORTED VISION:

A man once got glasses for the first time and said he was shocked at how clear things were. He had gotten so used

to having a distorted view of everything that a distorted view looked normal to him. But when he got his glasses, he saw things as they were really meant to be seen. It was like seeing things in high definition (HD). We all know about HD. It is normal today to request or even require HD in order to get a sharp picture on our televisions so we can see the idiosyncrasies and expressions on a person's face and see clearly all the details in the background scenery. We are born with distorted souls, yet it is God's desire for us to have an HD experience with Him, one where the color is sharp and clear and the picture is not full of ambiguity. The soul needs something to look through in order to clarify reality, because you can get so used to not seeing clearly that you think not seeing is seeing clearly!

CLASS EXPERIMENT:

Most of us had the chance early in our school days to plant a seed in a cup and then watch it grow. The teacher usually did that to illustrate the growth process of a flower or something else. But because as children we didn't understand the seed principle, we would plant something and then run to see it the next day, expecting the thing to have grown up overnight into a full plant. It was hard to be patient and wait for the seed to take root. Too many Christians are like that in their spiritual lives. They want the product, the blessing, of the seed without having to go through the process of development. People who look for instant maturity will be disappointed, just as school kids are disappointed when the seed in their cup doesn't sprout overnight.

BACKGROUND BIBLICAL HISTORY AND CULTURE:

THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM:

This term refers to the one-thousand year rule of Christ when He comes back a second time to establish His throne, defeat His enemies, and rule from the city of Jerusalem. Various Old Testament prophets, Isaiah in particular, pictured an ideal age when a child would be able to play freely with a poisonous snake, and the lion and the lamb would lie down together in peace. They were describing the millennial age when Christ will rule in perfect righteousness. The millennial kingdom is described in Revelation 20:1-3, and Revelation 19 makes it clear that we as the body of Christ in this age will return with Him and rule with Him in His glorious kingdom.

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SERMON LINES:

This message will help the audience grasp the importance of preparing the soil of their hearts so that the seed of God's Word does not fall on hardened soil where it cannot grow.

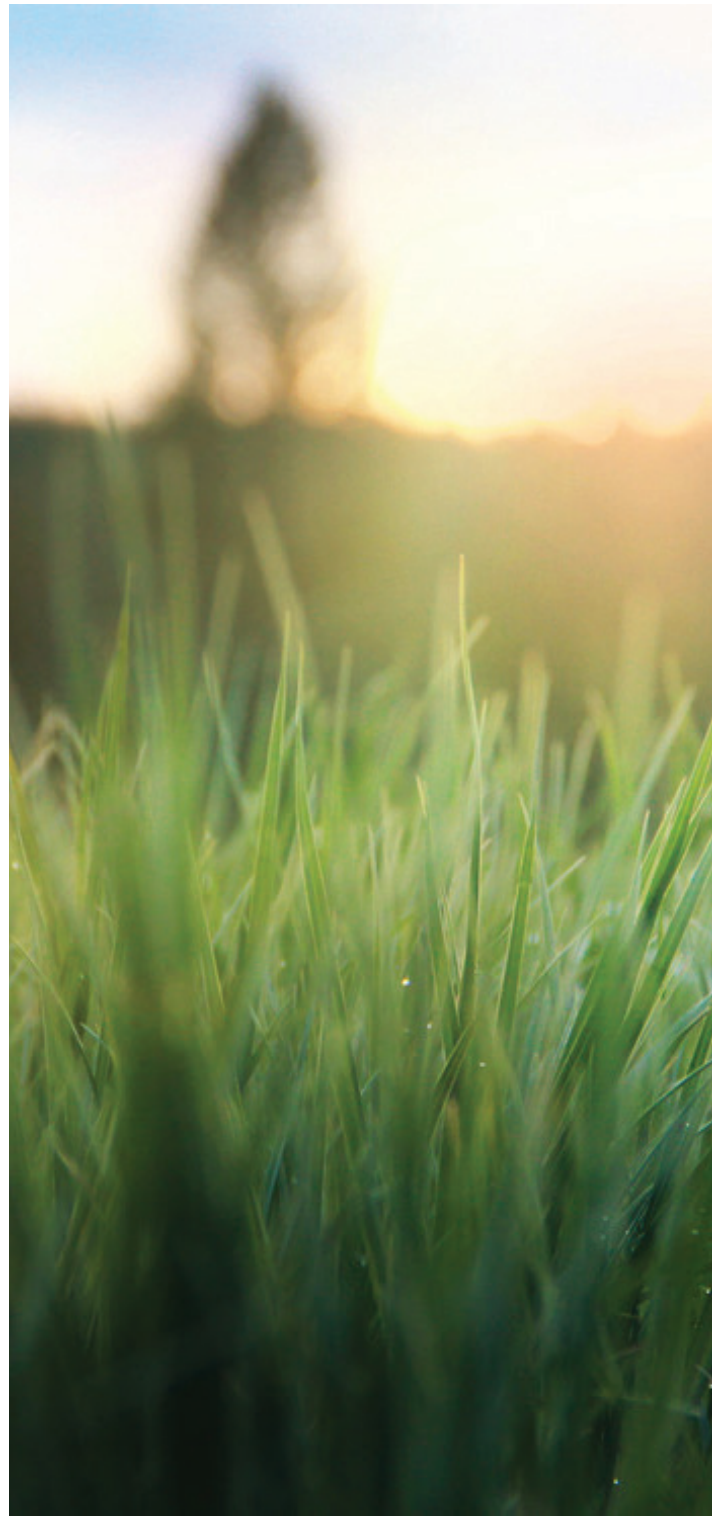
This message will also help people understand that as believers we have a dangerous, relentless enemy in Satan who is determined to steal the seed and ruin us spiritually in any way he can, just as he tripped up our first parents in the Garden of Eden.

QUOTES BY DR. TONY EVANS:

"A refusal to obey God's point of view makes you worse off than if you hadn't heard it at all, because even that which you have will be taken away. So you can actually hear God's Word and regress; you can get worse having heard God's Word if there is a hardened heart."

"If you come to church or wherever you're hearing the Word and there is not an openness of the soul to receive it, you have told the devil, 'Get here quick, because I'm giving you the right to snatch away what I just heard.'"

"You've seen hard people. In fact, now it's cool to be hard. Well, to be hard spiritually means to resist God, and to do that means that the devil can quickly rein you in."



MESSAGE 3:

THE HINDRANCES TO THE SEED

SUGGESTED PASSAGE: Luke 8:11-14 (NASB)

¹¹ "Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. ¹² Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved. ¹³ Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. ¹⁴ The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity."

MESSAGE GOAL: The goal of this message on *The Hindrances to the Seed* is to describe the different ways in which the enemy uses the distractions of this life as "thorns and weeds" to choke the life out of the new believer once the seed of the gospel has been sown into the "thorny" soil of the distracted, preoccupied, and worried human soul.

INTRODUCTION: The one thing that we all have wrong with us is a distorted soul. To varying degrees, everyone's soul has been infected and affected by sin. Nobody's soul is naturally intact, and it is very deceptive. We may think that something is wrong in one place or another, but actually all problems are manifestations of a dysfunctional soul.

Spiritual transformation, fundamentally, is the healing of the soul. The soul is the self, your inner being. Your soul is not your body; your body is merely the casing for your soul. Your soul involves your mind, emotions, will, and consciousness.

Most people settle for soul management, not soul transformation. They just try to keep their souls under wraps, make them behave. Even if they can't keep their souls under wraps, they try to keep their bodies from obeying their souls. They try to hold the soul down so it doesn't fully express itself. However, once the seed of the gospel has been embedded, since it can never be taken away, Satan (the enemy of the soul) must come up with a different strategy. If he cannot take the seed away, his second strategy is to keep the seed from reaching proper growth.

He wants to keep the seed hostage so that it does not mature as it was intended to do; he wants the growth of the seed to be hindered. Satan knows our strengths and weaknesses, and he seeks to exploit those in us. To do this, he uses a number of different methods.

One type of soil Jesus taught about was the rocky soil. This is shallow ground where the seed does not get to have a firm root. These people are believers; Jesus said they received the seed with joy. They celebrated the reception of the seed that is the new life in Christ; they received salvation. However, the enemy still wants to thwart the development of the seed so that it does not grow. In rocky soil the roots do not go deep enough, so that when bad weather comes, they are not able to withstand it and do not grow and become productive.

Trials have two sides. One side is God allowing a difficulty in your life in order to develop you. Trials are always, from God's point of view, developmental in nature. Every time you have a trial, you should dignify the difficulty by pursuing God and seeking what He wants to develop in you by allowing it in the first place.

So when you have difficulties, two things are happening: God is trying to develop you and Satan is trying to defeat you. Satan removes, or keeps, the roots from running deep and the shallow Christian wants to stay on the surface, the topsoil. The seed is there, but it is not rooted well. It doesn't go very deep because the person has decided not to go very deep.

SERMON POINTS:

1. GOD'S WORD PROVIDES STRONG ROOTS:

We need this strength because we know the enemy will attack us

- Matthew and Mark add that the rocky soil person did not take root when trials arose "because of the Word" (Matthew 13:21; Mark 4:17)
- This is another of the devil's strategies; but if he cannot snatch the seed immediately, he has back-up plans to thwart our growth, including bringing trials and persecution

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These attacks are aimed at the Word of God that has taken root in our lives

- God's Word challenges the perspective of the sin-affected soul, so Satan focuses his attack on the Word implanted in the soul
- We need to stay grounded in the Word to give the roots depth

2. THORNY SOIL IN OUR LIVES CAN CHOKE OUT THE GROWTH OF THE SEED:

If the devil can't get at us in other ways, he will use the world to choke and distract us

- This is one of the enemy's back-up plans if he fails to snatch the seed before it is established in our hearts, as he does on the soul with rocky soil
- The key here is that the things which distract us are the cares and worries of "this life"
- When we fall into this trap, we are living for this life instead of the life to come

"Thorny" Christians are those who want to move on, but are getting tripped up on the way

- A Christian who is allowing the things of this life to choke him is like a fish out of water, gasping for air
- Choked Christians can no more survive the "alien" environment of this world than a fish can in the alien environment of dry land; we aren't built for it

3. WE ARE BEING PREPARED FOR KINGDOM LIVING NOW, NOT JUST IN HEAVEN:

One of the exciting truths about Christ's millennial kingdom is that Christians are coming back with Him to exercise rule for these one thousand years

- We know that Christ will descend from heaven at His second coming and set up His throne in Jerusalem to rule the world for one thousand years
- The Bible says in Revelation 19 that Christians who were raptured before the tribulation will return with Christ to rule and reign with Him in His kingdom

Your faithfulness for Christ now determines the extent of your rule, or lack thereof, in the kingdom

- You are not getting prepared for heaven; you are getting prepared for earth. Before you live in heaven, you will live a thousand years with Jesus Christ managing the affairs of this planet

- Right now, Jesus is reigning spiritually in heaven at the Father's right hand, and we are seated there with Him, so there is a spiritual rule on earth until He physically comes to take care of the ruling Himself

SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS:

LOCATING THE PAIN:

You may have heard the story of the man who went to his doctor complaining that every part of his body was in excruciating pain. The doctor said, "You mean every part of your body?" The man said, "Yes, any place I touch I keel over in pain." The doctor proceeded to ask the man to touch his ear, his nose, his knee, and even his hair—and every time he did so, the man yelped in pain. The doctor suspected the problem and examined the man's finger only to find that it was dislocated. Sometimes that's how our lives feel. It seems that everything is wrong when there is really only one thing wrong, but it is affecting everything else.

GAME FILMS:

Every week, football teams study the game films of the team they're going to play that week, to identify strengths and weaknesses in order to exploit the other team's weaknesses. Satan has studied the game films of our lives. He knows our propensities, our strengths and weaknesses, and seeks to exploit those weaknesses.

TEMPER TANTRUMS:

We have all seen a child throw a temper tantrum. That's not good, but it's also possible to be an adult and still be throwing spiritual temper tantrums when we don't get what we want. We do this when we erupt in rebellion if the Word of our Father doesn't agree with what we want, and we are determined to have our way. Folks can throw temper tantrums in church because what they hear from God and what they want, prefer, and desire are in conflict, and they get ticked off.

CHOOSING THE MORE VALUABLE:

Suppose someone offered you ten million dollars with just one stipulation—that exactly one year after you got the money you had to commit suicide. That means only twelve months to enjoy the money. Now, most people would think it crazy to

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turn down ten million dollars for any reason. But if you're in your right mind, you are going to say "No deal!" because life is about more than money. You would rather have your salary and many more years to live because life is too valuable to throw it away like that. But what Satan does is similar to this offer. He makes the riches and pleasure of this life more important than the life to come, and too many people take him up on his offer that leads to death.

SERMON LINES:

This message will help you and your audience identify and deal with the signs and symptoms of a heart soil that is either rocky or thorny, and deal with the root issues so that nothing is allowed to thwart the growth of God's good seed within us.

This message will also help your audience understand the key principle of kingdom living—that we are being prepared to live as kingdom people in the "here and now" of this life, not just the "there and later" of Christ's millennial kingdom when He comes to rule.

QUOTES BY DR. TONY EVANS:

"Most people settle for soul management, not soul transformation."

"Every time you have a trial, you should dignify the difficulty. The way you do that is to begin to pursue what God is seeking to develop in you by allowing the trial to come your way in the first place."



MESSAGE 4:

THE CULTIVATION OF THE SEED

SUGGESTED PASSAGE: Luke 8:8, 15 (NASB)

⁸ Other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great." As He said these things, He would call out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." ¹⁵ "But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance."

MESSAGE GOAL: The goal of this message on *The Cultivation of the Seed* is to identify the good soil in our lives and develop ways in which we can nurture, nourish, and encourage the gospel seed in that soil to take root and grow to its full potential—free from distractions, disturbances, and impediments.

INTRODUCTION: We have explained that everybody's soul is distorted. We were born with distorted souls because we were all born in sin. That distortion became even more magnified through our experiences, through the sins we have committed, through our circumstances, and through our environment. All of these things have worked together to add to the distortion of our souls.

But when the seed of God's Word grows in the right soil, it changes the distortion. In Luke 8, verses 8 and 15, Jesus introduces us to the seed's work in good soil. We learn that the seed becomes fruitful only when the soil, the soul, is ripe to receive and cultivate it. So how do we receive the implanted Word "in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance?"

James 1:19-22 gives us solid answers to this question. We are told in this passage that God wants us to be "quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger..." Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls."

James says to Christians, "I want you to be quick to hear God's point of view on any matter," which means listening to God's Word rather than being quick to say, "Well, I've always believed...." or "My momma told me...." In other words, the first place you go is to God's Word to get His point of view, not

the last place you go after you've tried everything else. Often God's point of view is our last resort when every other point of view has not worked.

The thing that keeps the soul's soil from receiving the Word so the seed can grow is our point of view, which too often we are quick to speak about rather than being quick to hear what God has to say. This is a problem because, as we know, man's point of view almost always interferes with God's point of view. That's why James tells us to be "slow to speak." When you speak, you have to make sure that what you're saying is what God is saying.

James also tells us to be "slow to anger." He says that because when what God says contradicts what we say, we can get angry. We can throw a spiritual temper tantrum. What God wants from us is described in James 1:22: "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves." The main reason you want to address sin in your life is to remove any interference with the signal from God's Word reaching your soil to nourish and grow the seed.

SERMON POINTS:

1. THE GOAL IS NOT TO FIX THE DISTORTION, BUT TO GROW THE SEED IN OUR SOULS

As believers we already possess the seed of God's Word

- "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- We need to grow because the new life we have received is in seed form

We are born as spiritual babies, not fully-grown adult Christians

- We need to be reminded that there is nothing wrong with the seed in us
- The problem is that our soil may not be a good environment for the seed's growth

our society's problem
is not solely our *government's* problem.
it is **the church's** problem.
it is *our* problem.



2. THE SOUL MIGHT REBEL AGAINST THE GROWTH PROCESS

Even as believers, we can resist and reject the Word of God when we don't like what it says

- Rebellion can occur when the soul receives the Word but doesn't like the Word
- But once the Word gets into our souls, the seed is going to open up and life is going to flourish

The cure for rebellion is to receive the Word in godly humility

- We must embrace the Word, which means hold it tightly to us
- Once the Word gets into our souls, the seed is going to open up and life is going to flourish

3. WE WILL BEAR FRUIT WHEN OUR SOIL IS GOOD AND CONDUCTIVE TO GROWTH

There are three characteristics of the spiritual fruit we are to produce as Christians

- Characteristic #1: Fruit is always visible
- Characteristic #2: Fruit does not consume itself unless it is rotten
- Characteristic #3: Fruit is always for the benefit of others

Words have great power that can be used for good or evil

- Some people have used words to the harm of others
- How much more should we use the Word of God for good?

SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS:

TRYING TO CLEAN UP THE MESS:

In earlier days, before the development of technology and the more sophisticated ways of determining and measuring a patient's mental health, the staff at mental hospitals used an unusual technique to help judge whether a patient was well enough to be released. They would put a stopper in the sink of a janitor's closet and turn the water on until the sink was overflowing onto the floor. Then they would give a patient a mop and send him or her into the closet with instructions to clean up the mess. They would leave the patient alone for a few minutes and then come back to see how the patient dealt with the problem. If the patient was

simply mopping away at the water that was overflowing from the sink onto the floor without figuring out the root of the problem by turning the water off and pulling the plug, it was determined that this patient was not yet ready to be released.

Far too many of us are like that mental patient, spending an enormous amount of time trying to mop up the messes in our lives without getting to the root of the problem. But no matter how much mopping we do, if the stopper is still in the sink and the water is still running, we haven't changed our situation. Religion is man's attempt to mop up his own mess, to fix the stuff that's overflowing in his life, only to discover that it just keeps coming because we haven't gotten to the root of the problem.

RECEPTION PROBLEMS:

Many people have satellite television, which requires a receiver to pick up the signal from the satellite. That receiver is already set up to receive the signal from way out there in space so the person can watch television. Your new nature as a believer, the seed that has been planted in you, is already tuned to the Word of God. But many times people who have satellite receivers see the message on their screen that says, "Searching for signal." The problem is that something has interfered with the signal coming in. The good soil Jesus spoke about is soil in which the interference has been addressed so that the receiver, the seed, is able to pick up the signal that comes from the Word. This creates the growth of the seed in the life, or soul, of the believer.

GETTING THE RIGHT ANSWER:

Calculators are wonderful instruments that have been programmed to respond to the numbers you put into them. You don't have to make the calculator come up with the right answer; it's already set to do that. If you put one plus one into the calculator, it is going to come up with two. You just have to input the right information in order for the calculator to do its good work. When you become a believer, God placed within you that which is already set up to respond to His Word. Our only challenge is to make sure that we have the right soil to receive it. The Spirit of God wants to use the Word of God to make us like the Son of God.

**our mission field is not merely across the sea.
it is across the street.**



SERMON LINES:

This message is designed to encourage believers to do whatever is necessary to ensure that the soil of their lives is conducive to the full growth of the seed that is implanted within them.

This message also presents a strong statement of the requirements for that good soil, and calls believers to become fruitful and productive in their lives.

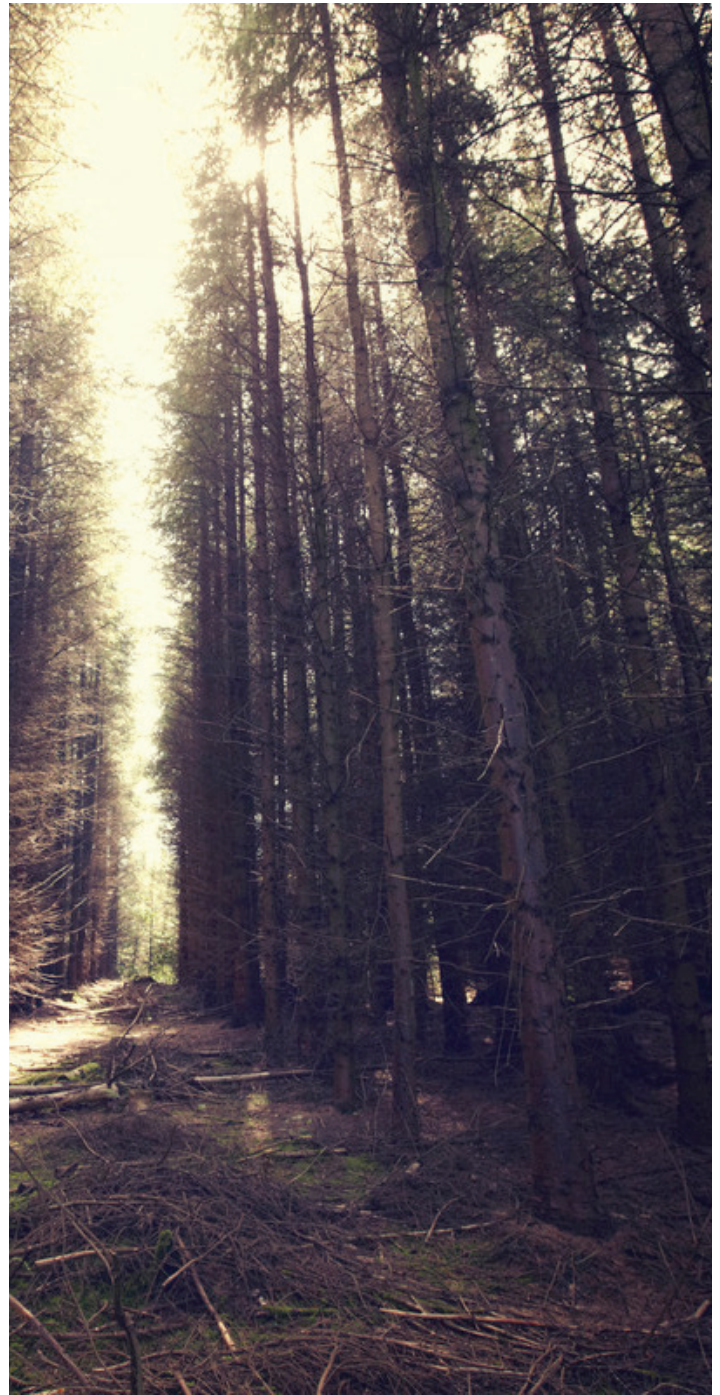
QUOTES BY DR. TONY EVANS:

"Religion is man's attempt to mop up his own mess."

"When you became a believer in Jesus Christ, God placed within you that which is already set up to respond to His Word. But your soil, your heart, must be conducive to receive that which is already there in seed form."

"Just being in church is not a transforming experience. We've all been in church and not changed. Even hearing the Bible preached is not a transforming experience. It may be an inspirational and informational experience, but in and of itself it is not a transforming one. Why? Because the Word must reach the seed implanted in your heart."

"Everything God wants to do in your life has already been placed in there if you possess the seed!"



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ChurchAdoptASchool.org

“You will be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea
and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”
Acts 1:8

That includes in our Jerusalem. In our Judea.
In Baltimore. Dallas. Miami. Detroit.

Our society's problems are not solely our government's problem.
It is the church's problem. It is our problem.

The National Church Adopt-a-School Initiative equips
churches to partner with schools to change our nation
through a proven model of community impact programs.



“What Tony Evans is doing
is not just commendable. It's
absolutely necessary. It is a
comprehensive answer to
addressing the urgent and
pressing issue in America.”

— Tony Dungy

NATIONAL CHURCH
ADOPT★A
SCHOOL
INITIATIVE

ChurchAdoptASchool.org

Rebuilding Communities
Intentionally

A One-Day Training Initiative for Community Impact

Public Schools Outreach

This six-hour workshop offers pastors and
church leaders the building blocks for starting
or enhancing the delivery of social services
to urban youth and families. Participants will
understand the process for adopting public
schools and creating programs, including
school-based mentoring, to meet the vast
needs of public school youth and their families.

The core of the training involves:
strengthening your capacity for ministry
• strategic outreach blueprint • how to
develop partner relations • resourcing the
vision • reaching the lost