

# “Fertile Soil and Faithful Sowing”

2 Timothy 3:14-17, Matthew 13:3-9 & 18-23

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Growing up on a dairy farm I learned stewardship from my parents. There was stewardship of the land. We planted over a thousand acres to grow the corn and alfalfa to feed our dairy animals. I had lots of big ideas to improve efficiency and to maximize profitability. Spring was always a race against the clock to get the crops planted. Therefore, I proposed that we plow our fields in the fall saving precious time in the spring like most of our neighbors. Dad responded that when you plow in the fall the soil is more exposed to erosion and a little topsoil is lost every year. Although it would likely take several hundred years before enough soil would be lost to reduce crop yield, Dad always put the stewardship of the land as the number one priority. We left trees around the fields to protect the soil and provide homes for animals, which reduced yields. We sparingly used herbicides and fertilized with more expensive environmental friendly fertilizers. Even though the profit margin in dairy farming was minuscule we always did all we could to be good stewards of the land. Dad often reminded me that land was a gift given to us by God. Even though by worldly law we owned the land, land is God’s gift to us and it is a great honor and privilege to be stewards of the land for a time. Our priority was to take the best care of the land and then hope that we would be profitable. Dad taught me that stewardship comes first and profitability second even though it means personal sacrifice by us for future generations.

I learned stewardship of time. There was always an abundance of work to be done on the farm but my parents made sure we attended church. Sunday mornings everyone was to be up on time and work quickly. Dad would get up at 4:00 rather than 4:30 to start milking. If we were running behind schedule any chores that could be delayed until after church were delayed. The option of very last resort was that dad would stay behind to finish the chores, so we could go to church. The goal was always to worship together as a family. At church, mom would sit beside dad. Sometimes he would doze off to sleep, but a quick elbow to the ribs kept him awake. On Wednesdays, Dad would do the chores by himself leaving him in the barn late into the night, so the rest of us could attend Wednesday discipleship at church. Even at our very busiest at planting time and harvest time, we would stop and go to church even though the delay often reduced profitability. The first priority for time was God and the second was family. Dad put tunnels in the haymow as we stacked the hay, so later we would have fun crawling through them together. We played catch while we unloaded the forage boxes. One time I overthrew the football and it went into the forage box, down the discharge apron, into the blower, up the 90 foot pipe, and into the silo. That winter the silo unloader spit out a chewed up football. I caught my first fish with Dad on our seven-acre lake. At Christmas we took the toboggan into our 40 acres woods and together cut down and pulled home our Christmas tree. When Dad and Mom retired they had two offers for the 100-acre track of land that included the woods and lake. The higher offer came from a larger farmer who planned to drain the lake and clear the forest and plant every inch of the land. The lower offer came from a busy hard working young family that wanted a close place where they could fish together, enjoy the woods, and get their Christmas trees. Dad and Mom took the lower offer. I don’t remember most of the toys I received as a child, but I do remember spending time together. Family is a precious gift God gives us. Being good stewards of our time unites us making our future brighter.

There was stewardship of money. The very first thing mom did upon receiving every milk check was to write out a check to church. My parents paid God first, and then figured out how to live on what was left. I was about seven when my parents started paying me for doing farm chores. My first responsibility was feeding the newborn calves. I was paid 5 cents per day for every calf I fed. I would mark my feedings on the calendar, and every Saturday I was paid somewhere between \$1 and \$3 in change. My parents then encouraged me to put some in an envelope for savings and 10% in an envelope for my tithe. I was proud as a child to get pledge envelopes, so every week I was able to contribute to the offering.

There was stewardship of one’s mind. My parents had a worn, often read Bible. Before supper one of us would read a card with a verse of scripture from “Our Daily Bread” box. Sunday school and youth fellowship taught me how to live my faith. Reverend Everhard inspired me to daily read scripture and strive to live it.

The Apostle Paul mentored Timothy. **2 Timothy 3:14-17(NLT)** “**You must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you. You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip God’s people to do every good work.**”

Today I realize that my life, all I have been given, and all I will receive is a gift given by the grace of God. How we live our life and how we use all that has been given to us is our stewardship.

In the parable of the sower, God provides everything: the seed, the soil, the sun, and rain to produce an abundant harvest. The fact that some soil is fertile represents faithful stewardship.

**Matthew 13:3-9 & 18-23 NLT** “**Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn’t have deep roots, they died. Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.**” “**Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds: The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and don’t understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word. The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God’s word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God’s word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!**”

This parable uses singular nouns to stress individual responsibility. Matthew writes that a person is “to hear the word and understand it.” Biblical scholar Douglas Hare writes, “Matthew’s use of the word “understands” must be interpreted from the Old Testament background where “understand” implies acknowledgement of God’s sovereignty. For Matthew to understand means to bring all that we are and all that we have under the guidance of God. To be a good steward is to hear the gospel message and respond by offering all that we have. It starts when we realize that God provides us with everything. The supreme proof is God’s gracious gift of Jesus. He paid the price for our sin on the cross and rose again to redeem our lives and offer us life eternal. Now Jesus is asking us to respond to his grace by using all of our selves and all that we have to love God and one another.”

The parable of the sower gives us three examples of people who hear the word but do not truly understand it. The seed sown on the path represents a person whose heart is hardened. They reject the love of God and live for themselves.

The seed sown on rocky ground is a scattered person who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; but there is little root, so they grow only for a while until trouble or persecution arises then that person fades away. Deep nurtured roots are needed to be sustained through hardship, loss, and persecution.

Some seed is sown among thorns. They hear the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of material possessions choke the life out of this person. They are seduced by consumerism, contaminated with fear, and distracted by worries. We all need to carefully examine our lives regularly pulling out the weeds before they choke love out of us. Weeds start small, grow fast, and spread quickly.

Some seed is sown in fertile soil. They rejoice in God’s love. They view everything as a blessing, a gift of God. They grow strong as they lovingly serve out of gratitude. They produce an enormous harvest. In Jesus’ day a good yield would be tenfold. Jesus says if we are fertile soil we will yield a supernatural abundance 30, 60, or in some cases 100 fold.

There is a double teaching in the parable. First, we are each to be fertile soil. Second all of us are to be the sowers. We stand in a long line of sowers. The disciples sowed love by teaching and writing the gospels. Early Christians sowed God’s love even though some of them were killed because of their faith. Reformers

risked their lives to sow education, so everyone can read the Bible learning about God's love. The founders of this country sowed a government, so everyone can worship freely. In 1887, nine people chartered, sowed, North Presbyterian Church. Faithful stewards have freely sowed their time, talents, and money ever since giving us this beautiful church today.

Thank you all for being faithful stewards, for being fertile soil, and joyfully sowing God's love. We all sow seeds by the way we live our lives wherever we go. The questions is do we sow wild oats and then come to church on Sunday and pray that what we have sowed will not grow or do we sow love then come to church praying that love will grow. Have you noticed that the sower sows generously everywhere on the fertile soil, the thorny soil, the rocky soil, and the path. We are not to judge but to give generously to everyone. Sow love everywhere for the path can be tilled, the thorns weeded, and the rocks removed. Often times we will not see until we get to heaven how our sowing took root and yielded an abundance, so our joy should be in having the opportunity to sow.

A few years ago I went to a conference celebrating the priesthood of all believers. The speaker was a seminary professor and author. He recalled how he helped at youth mission conference. He was assigned the job of snapping a mountain of green beans with a lady. He discovered that she was a distinguished medical doctor. He asked her why she made time to snap beans. She replied, "The youth will be hungry. These snapped beans will satisfy their hunger so they have energy to worship. Some of these youth may be inspired to devote their life as a missionary so I will not only snap these beans but will serve them with a joyful smile. I will pray that they will experience God's love and follow God's call." Several years later a missionary to Pakistan was invited back to speak at their mission conference. He was delighted to see this seminary professor and doctor. He gave them a hug and thanked them for serving him green beans. He shared with them how moved he was by their joyful serving of green beans and how that night he was inspired to be a missionary to Pakistan. Small menial gifts can yield a supernatural harvest of changed lives.

Mother Teresa said, "Spread love everywhere you go: first of all in your own house. Give love to your children, to your wife or husband, to a next-door neighbor ... Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness; kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile, kindness in your warm greeting."

Following the great depression in 1933, the Baptist pastor at Rotan stepped up to the side of an old Ford car worth about \$5 in which Mr. and Mrs. Stribling sat. At one time J.C. Stribling owned many sections of west Texas ranch land. He had several thousand head of cattle. He owned stocks and bonds galore. It was during this time that he gave \$150,000 to build Ruth Stribling Hall at Mary Hardin Baylor College. Then the depression came. He lost it all. He did not own a cow, not an acre of land, not a house, not even respectable clothing. As he sat there in his worn-out car the pastor said, "Last week I took a car load of young ladies to Mary Hardin-Baylor College. I had the privilege of spending the night in the guest room of the beautiful dormitory that you gave to honor God. Thank you for your wonderful gift. Mr. Stribling's eyes floated in tears and softly said, "That was all we saved of our mighty fortune." Presently he lifted himself as a victor and said, "Young preacher, tell your members to give all they can to the kingdom of God while they have it. I wish I had given more." Amen