

Evening Service - A Diagnostic Tool for the Heart

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Preacher: Rev. Mark Macleod

[0 : 0 0] If you can turn back in your Bibles to the parable of the sower there in Matthew chapter 13. We'll read in verse 18 just as a text, but really looking at the whole explanation of the parable of the sower from verse 18 down to verse 23 there.

But I'll read in verse 18 here then, the parable of the sower. Now, our hearts are a very important part of our bodies.

I'm talking about physically. Our hearts are very important in terms of all the different muscles we have in our bodies. Our hearts are the most important of all the muscles of the body.

It's quite literally pumping and keeping us alive. And for that reason, we're encouraged to keep it healthy. We're encouraged to look after the health of our heart in different ways.

But one of the ways in which we do that is to get it checked. There's various ways in which you can check how your heart is doing. Various diagnostic things that are available.

[1 : 1 3] Diagnostic tools that show us how it is that our heart is in terms of health. So physical health of our heart is very important. And we make sure we check it with these different diagnostic tools that we have available.

And just like it's important physically, this kind of thing is important spiritually as well. And the word of God gives us various different diagnostic tools to help us really to assess the heart.

To see how it is that the heart is actually doing. And one of the diagnostic tools that we have in Scripture, I think, is this parable here. A wonderful parable. But a parable that we can use in that way to actually diagnose the heart.

Because it's a parable that really very much highlights the nature of the problems that we have. The problems that we can have in our hearts. Because when you read it, you see it's a parable that's all about the heart.

It's very much about the heart. About how the heart responds to God. How the heart specifically responds to the word of God. So when the word of God comes in, what does our hearts do?

[2 : 2 3] How do our hearts actually respond? And in the parable, you've got these four grounds. And the four grounds really are designed to teach or to show an example of different kinds of hearts.

So four different kinds of hearts. And fundamentally, at a fundamental level, the parable is really designed to show the difference between true believers, i.e. true faith, and unbelievers or false faith.

So when you look at all the different grounds. So for example, you would say the hearts that are described as the hard heart or the rocky or the stony heart and the thorny heart.

Those clearly are grounds that are describing an unbeliever. Some of them are describing no faith at all, like the hard ground. We'll come on to that in a few moments. But then you've got the stony and the thorny or the rocky and the thorny as well.

And they look like faith for a wee while, but we find out that it's not true faith at all. It's a false kind of faith. And then you've got the good ground.

[3 : 29] So the good ground, that's the picture of the true believer. The picture of the heart that has been truly transformed by the Spirit of the Lord. So fundamentally, that's what this parable is about.

And I'm in no way denying that that's what the parable is about. However, although that is true, it's also true that for us as the Lord's people, as those who are already saved, those who have come to true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is possible to see traces of these other grounds in our hearts.

I think we all feel that, those of us who are the Lord's, when we read a parable like this. We can't but notice that. And what I mean by that is sometimes, even as the Lord's people, those who are truly the Lord's, sometimes we can sense our hearts being like the hard ground, can't we?

We can sense that. We can see little traces of that creeping into our own hearts. And there's other times we can sense our hearts being like the stony ground, being like the shallow ground.

We can see these things. We can be convicted when we read a parable like this. And there's other times as well where we can see traces of the thorny ground. So even as the Lord's people, even as those who are saved, we can see traces of these things.

[4 : 52] And that's what I mean when I say that we can use a parable like this as a diagnostic tool. Because yes, on the one hand, absolutely, fundamentally, the parable is designed to highlight the clear distinction between unbelievers and believers.

That is absolutely the case. But it can. It can also function as a way of true believers really detecting some unhealthy traits perhaps that are creeping into our hearts spiritually.

And we can use that to seek the Lord's help when we become aware of it. So what I want to do, just for a little time this evening, I want to think about this parable here.

But I want us really to think about it with those two things in mind. So from the perspective of the distinction between the believer and the unbeliever, so we definitely want to highlight that. But also to actually use the parable as this kind of diagnostic tool.

And for those of us who are already Christians, then to ask ourselves, well, are we detecting? Are we detecting maybe some of these things finding its way into our own hearts as well?

[6 : 03] So that's kind of the two angles that I want to take this evening. So looking at those two things as we make our way through each of the grounds that are described here. And like most parables, the parable here, it's clearly a very graphic picture.

And it centers around the seed. So the seed is the word of God. We know that's the case. So the seed is being scattered. It's the word of God going out.

And this is all about how the ground responds to that seed being scattered on it. In other words, how people, how different people or different hearts respond to the gospel.

That's the case even as we gather around tonight. Different hearts, different people, seed of the gospel being scattered. But how do we respond? How do we respond to the word of the Lord?

So we're just very simply going to go through each of the four grounds. So a fairly straightforward structure for this evening. And ask yourself, when we're looking at it, ask yourself, where am I in this?

[7 : 05] Which ground describes me? And if you're already the Lord's, then ask yourself, can I see traces of some of these things in my heart? But be on the lookout, asking yourself these kind of questions to use this parable as a diagnostic.

As a diagnostic to see how it is your own heart is. What condition you're in. So let's look at the first ground that we have there. And the first ground is the one that we often refer to as the hard ground.

And see that in verse 19 there. So when anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.

This is what was sown along the path. So that's what we're used to hearing as the hard ground.

And clearly this would have been pathways that were going through their fields. The pathways that the people would have walked on. It's going to be well trodden. Because it's well trodden like that, it's going to be very compressed.

[8 : 08] And over the years it would become very hard. Almost like a concrete finish. Especially when you think of the climate in that part of the world. A very solid finish to it. And when the seed is falling here, it doesn't penetrate through the ground.

It just lies. It lies on the surface of the ground itself. And that leaves it exposed. And when it's exposed like that, it's easy picking for the birds. The birds just come and the birds will be delighted.

The birds taking that seed. And Jesus tells us that this is a heart that hears the word. So they hear the word. They receive something of the seed. The seed is scattered on them.

But it barely registers. It barely registers. It doesn't enter in. Before it's snatched away again. And it's snatched away again by the devil. As we see the description there.

So these are the people who get told how to be saved. They're told the gospel. Told about Jesus. That Jesus died on the cross for sinners. Get told about heaven and hell and all these things.

[9 : 05] But it goes in one ear. And then it goes straight out the other. In fact, I suppose you could say it doesn't even go in the ear. It just sort of lands on us. It doesn't penetrate in any way.

So they hear it. These are people who hear it. But they don't hear it. They're numb to it. Remember we were talking on Friday evening about spiritual leprosy.

And the way in which spiritual leprosy leaves us numb. We just don't feel. And that's the case here. They hear the good news. But they're utterly numb to it. It makes absolutely no impression on them.

And what happens is as soon as they hear it. As soon as the seed is scattered. The devil is taking it away. Because the devil is not going to leave it there. The devil is not going to leave that seed lying on the outskirts of that heart.

In case that seed gets in. The enemy, absolutely. He's going to come in. And he's going to take that away. Before that seed finds its way into the hard heart. And that's a solemn reality when you think of that.

[10 : 03] It reminds us how active the devil actually is. Even in the place of worship. It's quite something, isn't it? You know, even as we gather together. The seed is scattered and sticks straight away.

When it lands on the hard heart. The enemy is there. The enemy is there plucking it up. And maybe if you're a Christian here tonight. Maybe you remember when that was the case. Maybe you remember this sort of thing.

I know I remember it. I remember the seed being scattered on my heart. And it made absolutely no impact at all. And maybe that's still the case for some of us in here this evening.

It's like you hear it. You hear the sound of the gospel. You hear the message. But at the same time, it's like you don't hear it at all. So ask yourself, is that what I'm like?

Is that what my heart is like? And if it is, ask the Lord to break down that heart. Ask the Lord to come in and work. Ask the Lord to break the hardness of your heart. But even for those who have come to faith in Christ, we can go through periods when we detect this.

[11 : 07] So those who are genuinely the Lord, we can go through periods where we detect that kind of hardness in our hearts. Times where it's almost like we become deaf to the word of God. And it's like we almost for a time stop feeling.

Perhaps even we stop hearing. Maybe because we're steeped in sin. Maybe just because our love for the Lord has grown cold. Maybe there's different reasons why this might happen. But it's something that can absolutely happen.

The traces of that hard ground. We start to feel it. We start to see something of it in our lives. And that's something, as the Lord's people, that's something that we absolutely have to be on our guard for.

Asking the question, are we becoming? Are we becoming hard to the word of God? And if that's the case, repent. Acknowledge it. Notice it. That's the most important thing. Notice it.

And then repent. Repent of it. Come before the Lord. Ask the Lord. Soften my heart, Lord. I'm aware of it hardening. Soften my heart. Reignite in me a sense of that love and passion that I once had for the Lord.

[12 : 11] So notice that. And act on it. Do something about it. Come. Come to the Lord himself. So yes, when you look at this particular ground here, yes, fundamentally it's describing a hardened unbeliever.

Absolutely. That is fundamentally what it is describing. But also, as believers, ask yourself, do I see traces? Do I see traces of this in my heart?

So that's the first ground. The hard ground. Now, the second ground is the rocky or the stony, depending on how you learned it when you were young. Probably I always think of it as the stony ground.

So that's the second one, the stony ground. In verse 20, as for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy.

Yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while. And when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. So this ground is quite different, really.

[13 : 09] This ground, there's clearly enough soil here for something to grow. So the seed does sprout initially. But the issue here is that there's not much depth.

It's stony ground. There's not depth. So the roots can't get down. Because the roots can't get down, it can't draw up any moisture. It can't draw up any water. And that means that when the sun comes out, it scorches the plant.

The sun comes out and it scorches the plant and the plant dies. And Jesus tells us there that this is like someone who initially responds to the gospel.

So there is some kind of response. In fact, a very quick and immediate response. There's some kind of response immediately receiving the gospel with joy. But then difficulties come in.

Hard things come in. You know, things connected to being a Christian. And things become more difficult. And what happens is they just fall away. They just walk away from the Lord Jesus Christ.

[14 : 06] So this ground, unlike the hard ground, you're actually seeing something. It does actually produce some kind of growth. And in fact, if you're actually standing and seeing all these grounds, this ground would have actually been the first ground to show any sign of anything.

Because we read it immediately sprang up. Because of the nature of how shallow the ground was, the effect was quick. So straight away, you're seeing something.

And actually, if the sower was to come back to see how these different grounds were doing, he would probably have mistaken this crop as the good ground.

Because of how quickly the growth would have been. The initial growth would have been. And the sower would have no doubt had much hope for this ground. Oh, I've got hope for this. This looks encouraging.

This looks good. This looks like something could come of it. But the problem, solemnly, the problem is that the growth isn't lasting. It doesn't actually come to anything.

[15 : 08] And that is solemn. There are some people who, they'll hear the gospel. And they'll, to some extent, embrace it with outstretched arms. And a real sense of joy as well.

And externally, you look at them and it looks as though they're on fire for the Savior. The fast response to what looks like a fast growth full of energy. Full of zeal as well.

And sometimes people who are described by this stony ground, sometimes they can actually look initially like they're outgrowing the zeal of Christians who have been on the path for many a year, many a decade.

And again, there's hope. And you look at people like that and there's encouragement. But there's a fundamental problem. A fundamental problem with the heart that's described as this stony heart.

And the problem is there's nothing below the ground. So their Christianity is only what is visible on the outside. It's all external. They actually have no root at all.

[16 : 07] There's no saving grace at work there. They have no root in the Lord Jesus Christ at all. These people, they don't actually have the spirit. It's all external.

It's all just what's on the outside. There's no real love for the Lord. There's no real love for the Lord driving them. Very often, these people don't have any issue with sin and conviction of sin. And all these kind of spiritual struggles that the Lord's people can go through.

Christianity is very much all about the outside. All about the external. Not about the internal at all. And eventually what happens, according to the parable there, the sun comes out.

The different trials and temptations and some of the hardships that are maybe connected to being a believer in the Lord. And these people, they're not willing to put up with us.

As soon as things get hard, they're not willing to stick it out at all. And they just give up. They turn their backs on the Lord Jesus Christ. And in a sense, that's not a surprise.

[17 : 06] Because they don't have saving faith. They don't have the Holy Spirit actually at work in them. And they just turn away. And it is sad to see that. But we do see that.

We do see that. It's very sad. Incredibly discouraging. But it happens. And these parables here are designed to show us that these things happen.

Solemnly, these things happen. And again, even for those of us who actually are truly the Lord, those of us who have a true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, again, we can sometimes detect something of this in our hearts as well.

You know, when trials come our way. And when difficulties, when hardships come our way. So even though we do have the Spirit in us, you know, we do have the Spirit at work in us, we can find ourselves, when we go through these times of difficulty and hardship, we can find ourselves almost wanting to give up.

You know, almost to the point of just turning our backs. Turning our backs. Because of how hard we're finding it. Because of how hard we're finding the faith. Because of how hard we're finding the different trials that come our way because of our faith.

[18 : 17] It's like, I don't know if I can do this. And Job was like that. Job comes so close to that. Job never curses God and dies. That's true. But when you read through the book of Job, my goodness, he comes close.

He's finding it hard. He's finding it very, very hard. And it can be tempting for ourselves as well to give up. But when the Christian life is hard, when being a Christian is hard.

And the devil is at us at times like that, saying, just give up. Just walk away. You know how much easier your life would be if you just forget about all this Christianity stuff. Forget about Jesus.

Turn away. Life will be easier. All these difficulties that you're having, they'll all, all these things will just go away. That's what the devil will be saying. It's a lie. It's a lie from the enemy. That's what he does.

He's trying his hardest to pull us away from Christ. And he doesn't care what lies that he feeds us. And he does. He feeds these lies to us. Just give up. Just give up.

[19 : 16] And things will be easier. But what we need in times like that is not to turn our backs on Christ. What we need is the opposite. What we need is to dig our roots deeper down into Christ himself.

That's what we need. We need not less of Christ. It's not less of Christ you need when you find things difficult and these hardships and trials that you experience. What you need is more of Christ.

The deeper our roots in Christ, the more able we are then to endure the heat of that sun when it comes out. Because guaranteed the sun will come out in terms of the trials and the difficulties.

And we want our roots to be as deep down into Christ as possible. So we can be strengthened, enabled, nourished, encouraged, helped through these times of challenge and difficulty. So that's the second ground there.

That stony, rocky ground. And again, we have to ask ourselves, do we see something of that? Do we notice something of that in our own hearts? And again, if we do, we know what we have to do.

[20 : 16] Go to the Lord. Go to the Lord and pray to the Lord that the Lord would dig down those roots, that the Lord would prepare the ground of your heart. So that takes us to the third.

Third ground that we have there. And that's the thorny ground. So in verse 22, we read there, As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

So a different kind of ground there. And like the stony ground or the rocky ground, the thorny ground also sees a little bit of growth.

There's quite a lot of similarities actually between the thorny ground and the stony ground here. And this is another example of someone who does show some kind of a response to the gospel.

But the issue here is that the plant isn't growing in isolation. It's not growing in isolation. And alongside the plant, there's thorns growing.

[21 : 27] And eventually in the picture, the thorns outgrow this plant that is growing. And the thorns wrap around the plant. And the thorns choke and kill off the plant altogether. And we see there what were these thorns.

Well, it's described there. Jesus explains the thorns as the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches.

So that's what these thorns are. Now, this is the kind of heart who hears the word, receives it joyfully, like the last ground as well, makes some kind of a response.

But their number one priority is still the world. The number one priority is still the world. This kind of person allows worldly desires to be ultimately more important to them than the Lord Jesus Christ and the gospel.

And again, like the previous ground, you can look at people like that. And they seem, again, to be making progress in the faith in the sense of it looks like they're being convicted by the word and looks like they're desiring to know more about Jesus.

[22 : 39] Their attendance in church maybe starts to pick up a little as well. But eventually, very quickly, their true love comes through. And their true love ultimately being the world itself.

The grips of the world just pulls them down. Other things, other things become more important than Christ. And it becomes very clear that what their real love is, is the things of this world.

And these people never fully commit to the Lord. They might follow for a time, but very quickly, they give in. The thorns get to them. These other things that they love more, these things take hold.

And again, so sad when you see this. But we do. And sadly, we see it so often as well. Some kind of response. We feel as though something's going on.

And then all of a sudden, the grips of the world gets a hold of someone and just pulls them completely away. And notice as well, when Matthew describes these thorns here as the deceitfulness of riches.

[23 : 39] Deceitful is exactly what those things are. The things of the world. That's exactly what they are. These are things that appeal to us. See, the devil knows exactly what it is that he's doing.

He makes things appealing to us. He's the greatest advertiser there is. He's able to make something look great and draw you to it.

And he draws you to these worldly things. And what we find is that these things are not as advertised. These things are nothing but thorns. Thorns.

There's deceit. The devil is employing deceit and drawing us towards these things. And it reminds me, the image here reminds me of a cartoon that I remember watching a long time ago when I was a child.

And in the cartoon, you have this character who's in the desert somewhere. And he's being chased. And the cartoon character's running away. And the cartoon character just sees desert everywhere.

[24 : 38] And the cartoon character's thirsty, wanting to drink something. And in the distance, he sees a fountain. What do you know? In the middle of the desert. A fountain of water. And you see the cartoon character just running towards this fountain.

Jumping at this fountain. But of course, it's not a fountain. It's a mirage. It's an illusion. And what actually is it, it's a cactus. And he's got all these prickles all over him after he jumps into this cactus.

And that's exactly, that picture there, that's exactly the way these worldly pleasures are like to us. We get drawn to them. We get attracted to them. Wonderful adverts.

We see them up ahead. But then when we lay hold of these things, we find that it's just like that. Just like the cartoon character jumping into the cactus. We find these things to be thorns. We don't realize they're thorns. But when we lay hold of them, we find these things to be thorns in our lives.

Thorns that ultimately pull us away from anything to do with the gospel. See, the gospel demands that we put Christ first. That's the clear demand.

[25 : 38] If our so-called faith is a faith that actually puts worldly gain and worldly pleasures and these sort of things ahead of Christ, then eventually the things of this world will choke that so-called faith.

That's not real faith at all. It'll choke that so-called faith altogether. And again, when we look at a ground like that, we have to ask ourselves, well, am I putting Christ first?

Or is this what my heart is like? Is my heart really like this thorny ground where I hear the gospel, I'm interested, but actually the things of the world, these things are still more important to me.

And again, if that is the case for you, ask the Lord to work in your heart. Ask the Lord to weed those thorns and to make your heart ready to receive the seed of the gospel. But also, you're thinking of this in terms of the diagnostic tool.

If we are the Lord's, so if we do have true saving faith in the Lord, we have to be careful that we don't allow this kind of spirit to seep into our own experience.

[26 : 42] And that we don't allow this kind of spirit to seep into our own hearts. Because this can be a very subtle thing. Where bit by bit, you take your eye off of Christ. And we know this can happen. And those of us who are the Lord's in here, you can testify to that yourself.

Bit by bit, we can slowly take our eye away from Christ. And our eye perhaps gets lured to the things of the world. Maybe the things that drew our attention before we were converted.

And we can feel ourselves being drawn back to that. Don't allow that to happen. Let's make sure. Let's be alert to that. And let's make sure that we don't end up falling into our old way of life.

Let us not get drawn aside by worldly pleasures. To the extent that these things become more important to us than the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

So watch that. We can never lose our salvation. And I want to stress that when I'm using this as a diagnostic tool. We can never lose. When we're the Lord's, we can never lose that salvation. Absolutely.

[27 : 38] Praise the Lord that that's the case. But we can do damage to our spiritual health. We can stunt our growth when we see some of these things manifesting themselves in our hearts.

So again, if we see that, address it. Come to the Lord and ask for the Lord's help. So that's the third ground. But then the fourth ground that we have here is the good ground. See that in verse 23.

As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields. In one case, a hundredfold.

In another, sixty. And in another, thirty. So it's interesting really when you look at the four grounds. Out of these four grounds, three of them actually produce growth.

So three grounds initially you see some semblance of growth. But there's one big difference between the seed and the good ground compared to the other grounds.

[28 : 37] And this is almost a case of spot the difference. What is the difference? Well, the difference is that the good ground produces something. The good ground produces fruit. That's the purpose of seed.

It's not just for greenery. You don't just want the greenery. You want end product. You want it to come to something. You want to see some kind of fruit. You want to see in the parable here.

Some kind of a crop. And Jesus is teaching here that some people will show signs of growth. Some people will show signs of apparent faith.

But not all will bear the fruit of true and lasting faith. It's a solemn lesson. Incredibly solemn lesson.

And what the parable is teaching really is that it's not just those who hear. And who just outwardly make some kind of sign that they've received the gospel. It's not just people who outwardly give that sign that are saved.

[29 : 37] But those who hear, understand, and bear fruit. That last part's important. It's a responding, a hearing, an understanding, and a bearing fruit. And the fruit of the Christian life.

That's the evidence of saving faith. We're thinking about that earlier on today. I think it was in the fencing of the table. The fruit is the evidence. That fruit of changed desires.

That fruit of changed priorities. Changed outlook. Changed worldview. We begin to see evidences of the fruit of the Spirit actually being produced in our lives.

There's something there. It's a faith that leads to something. It doesn't mean that we become perfect. I stress that in the morning service as well.

It doesn't mean that we become perfectly fruitful. But we do produce fruit because the Spirit is in us. It so does. It's the Spirit of God. When the Spirit of God indwells, there's going to be signs of these things.

[30 : 34] And it's interesting. Some a hundredfold. Some sixty. Some thirty. You know, the picture is it doesn't matter how much fruit. It's not about comparing yourself to other Christians. We do this a lot.

Comparing ourselves. And, oh, I'm not as good as them, so I'm not going to go forward. It's not about comparing ourselves to other people. It's not about how much fruit we produce. It matters that we are fruitful.

That we are fruitful. That we see evidences of the saving work of the Lord in our lives. The good ground that's described here, ultimately, that's the only ground that's pictured as the Holy Spirit coming in.

As the Holy Spirit coming in and actually renewing and actually producing new life. The other grounds, it might have looked like it, but it never came to anything because ultimately the Holy Spirit was not there.

And the question really, I suppose, we want to ask is, what makes the good ground good? What is it that makes the good ground good? You know, if you're the Lord's in here tonight.

[31 : 32] You know, if you've come to saving faith. What is it that makes the good ground good? Is it because you're somehow better than the person who's described as the hard ground or the stony ground or the thorny ground?

Is that what it is? That you've sort of got yourself into a place where your heart is good and your heart is ready? Is it us? Have we done the work? And the answer to that is not at all. Well, what makes the good ground good?

Very simply, the divine gardener himself. The Lord. It's the divine gardener himself. He has prepared. He has prepared our hearts, the ground of our hearts, to receive the seed.

So he's broken down the hard ground. And that was there before. He's broken that down. He's cultivated that ground. Made us able to receive that seed. He's dug deep to give us roots.

He's taken away the shallow ground. He's taken away the stones and the rocks. He's taken away the thorns. It's the divine gardener, not us. It's not us who've prepared our hearts. It's the Lord himself. The Lord is the one who's doing this work in our hearts, enabling us to respond to it.

[32 : 37] So it's all about God. It's the Lord himself, not us, who makes our hearts good. And to that end, if you're looking at a parable like this, and you look at all these different grounds, and you see yourself as being like one of the other three grounds, then respond by coming to the Lord.

You're never going to prepare your own heart. You're never going to get your own heart into a good place in order to be saved. And if you try and do that, you'll be doing that all your life, and you'll get nowhere. What you have to do is turn to the Lord, turn to the divine gardener himself, and you say to him, make my heart ready.

I know my heart is hard. I know my heart is like the stony ground or the thorny ground. Lord, make my heart ready. I can't do it. Left to myself, I cannot do it. But I know, Lord, that you can.

And that's what you must do. And if you're outside of Christ tonight, described as one of those grounds, ask the Lord to change your heart. Because the Lord is a God who not only hears prayer, but he answers.

And he is the perfect divine gardener to do just that. And also, if we are already the Lords, then let's use this parable here as a diagnostic tool, like I was mentioning earlier on.

[33 : 54] The Word of God, I want to stress this, that the Word of God makes it very clear that when you're saved, you'll never lose that. It's not that you can go from being the good ground all of a sudden being one of the other grounds.

That can never happen. When we're saved, when we're truly saved, we will never lose that salvation, but we can fall into bad habits. And that's really the point I'm trying to make there in terms of using this as a diagnostic.

We can cause our growth to be stunted. And that happens when we allow traces of those other grounds. Traces of the hardy ground. Traces of the stony ground. Traces of the thorny ground.

When we allow traces of these grounds into our hearts, it can cause all sorts of problems. And it can be subtle. It can be so subtle. That's why you need to actually actively think about these things.

It can be so subtle. There's little things here and there that we notice. Well, use this parable there as a diagnostic. And ultimately, when we see those things, again, same solution as what I mentioned for the unbeliever.

[34 : 57] You go to the divine gardener himself. You go to the Lord himself and you ask for the Lord's help. You ask for the Lord's help to help to work in your heart once more.

To enable, to make you more fruitful for his glory. To enable you to grow in your faith. So let's use this parable here as a mirror.

And ultimately, pray that the Lord would continue to work in our hearts. And if he hasn't yet begun that work, pray that he would do so. Amen. We pray for God's blessing on these few thoughts.

We'll bow our heads now in a word of prayer. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we give thanks that as we come around your word that the seed is scattered.

The good news of the gospel, that wonderful message of Jesus dying on the cross for sinners like us. And our prayer is as that seed goes out.

[36 : 01] And that would indeed fall on good ground. We know every one of us in here at one time, we can look back on our hearts being like the hard, the stony or the thorny. Perhaps even a combination of all three.

But for those who are your own, you have worked. And you have worked in miraculous ways. And you have completely changed the trajectory of our lives. You have changed our desires. You have changed our priorities.

You have changed what we live for. You have given us life itself. And our prayer is that that will be true of all of us. That all our hearts would be prepared to receive that seed.

Because we know that when that work is done by the Spirit, and when that seed then lands on our hearts, it produces not just a false faith, not even just a false response, but through lasting faith that leads to fruit, the fruit of obedience in the Christian life.

So help us, we pray, as we, even as your people, diagnose our own hearts. And when we see traces, unhealthy traces of things in our hearts, help us again to come to you, the one who is able to work and the one who is able to make us grow again.

[37 : 09] Cleanse us, we ask. We ask it all for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our time of worship to a conclusion now by singing to God's praise in Psalm 126 in the Scottish Psalter.

So, Psalm 126. And you'll find that on page number 419.

So, page 419. Psalm 126. So, we'll sing the whole psalm there to the praise of God.

When Zion's bondage God turned back, as men that dreamed were we. Then filled with laughter was our mouth, our tongue with melody. They among the heathen said, The Lord great things for them hath wrought.

The Lord hath done great things for us, whence joy to us is brought, as streams of water in the south. Our bondage, Lord, recall, who sow in tears a reaping time. Of joy, in joy they shall.

[38 : 19] That man who bearing precious seed, in going forth doth mourn. He doubtless, bringing back his sheaves, rejoicing, shall return.

So, we'll sing the whole psalm there, and we'll stand to sing to God's praise. Amen. Amen. When Zion's bondage God turned by, as men that dreamed were we.

As men that dreamed were we. Then filled with laughter was our mouth, our tongue with melody.

Our tongue with melody. Our tongue with melody. Our tongue with melody.

Our tongue with melody.

[39 : 50] When joy to us is brought. When joy to us is brought. When joy to us is brought.

When joy to us is brought. As streams of water in the south, Our bondage, Lord, recall, who sow in tears a reaping time.

Of joy and joy, of joy and joy they shall. Of joy and joy they shall. Of joy and joy they shall.

Of joy and joy they shall. That man who bearing precious seed, in going forth doth mourn.

And going forth doth mourn. He doubtless bringing back his sheaves.

[41 : 19] And rejoice and joy they shall. And rejoice and joy they shall return.

And now may the grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit continue with you all now and forevermore. Amen.