

Giving Our Children Faith

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

1st in a five-part series

August 11, 2019

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Matthew 13:1–9 (NIV)

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake.² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore.³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed.⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

¹⁸“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means:¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.²⁰ The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.²² The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.²³ But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

How do we help our children to be good soil into adulthood?

This week, we begin a new five-part series called, *Equip*. Our idea was to create a sermon series around a set of books that we would recommend to those who are part of St. Andrew. First up is a book about raising our children with a faith in Christ that endures into adulthood. Nearly every parent and grandparent that I know in the church has wrestled with this. Sure, we get the kids to church and Sunday school, but as they grow up, they often begin to drift away. Through middle and high school, pressures and questions grow and it seems that our youth are often ill-equipped to deal with them. And then, like earlier generations, they head off to college, leaving their faith behind. Once upon a time there were societal pressures and expectations that would bring young adults back, especially once they started families of their own. But all that is fast fading away and young adults have stayed away from the church in response.

What can we do? That is the question tackled by Kara Powell in her book, *Sticky Faith: Everyday ideas to build lasting faith in your kids*, as she explains:

The board of the National Association of Evangelicals, an umbrella group representing sixty denominations and dozens of ministries, has passed a resolution deploring “the epidemic of young people leaving the evangelical church.” But is it really an epidemic? Does the data suggest that kids’ exit from the faith is more like a trickle, or a flood? As we have examined other research, our conclusion is that 40 to 50 percent of kids who graduate from a church or youth group will fail to stick with their faith in college. Let’s translate that statistic to the kids you know. Imagine your child and his or her friends standing in a line and facing you. (I’m sure they are smiling adoringly at you.) Just like you used to do on the playground to divide into teams, number off these kids, “one, two, one, two, one, two ...” The ones will stick with their faith; the twos will shelve it. And they’ll be making the decision about whether to shelve their faith after your most

intensive season of parenting is over. I'm not satisfied with a 50 percent rate of Sticky Faith.¹ Are you?

As I began to read through this book, I kept thinking of Ellsworth Kalas's take on the Parable of the Sower. You might take a minute and read it (above).

The Parable

This parable, like all of Jesus' parables, was told for a reason. Jesus had a message for the people that was hard for them to hear and to understand. The job of the parable is to open their ears and minds, as all great stories ought to. In this seemingly straightforward parable, Jesus packs yet another big surprise for his listeners.

One difficulty many Christians have with the parables is that we are unable to see connections to the Old Testament that would have been plain for Jesus, his disciples, and the crowds. The Jews of Jesus' day knew all about sowers and seeds. Hundreds of years before Jesus, the prophet Isaiah had promised that God's word would go forth like sprouting seed, returning full and accomplishing God's purposes (Isaiah 55:8-11). By Jesus' day, "sowing" was a stock metaphor for teaching and preaching, as was "harvest" for the climactic ingathering of God's people at the coming of God's kingdom.

So, when Jesus started talking about a sower, the crowds would have expected some upbeat story about the sprouting of God's word. But what a surprise awaited them! The sower (God) spreads his seed (God's word – Jesus' proclamation of the arrival of God's kingdom) but some seed does *not* bear fruit. Some seed falls on inhospitable ground and is lost. The crowds listening to Jesus must have wondered who it was that would not participate in God's harvest on that long-anticipated Day of the Lord. Could it be some of them, some of Israel, God's chosen people? Could it be that God would not simply affirm Israel as she stood? This parable certainly would have gotten the crowd going.

Still, even as Jesus' listeners puzzled over who Jesus meant by the unfruitful seed, they would have understood that God's purposes wouldn't be thwarted. In the parable, even though some seed is lost, God still reaps a bountiful, even miraculous, harvest.

Sometimes, Jesus provided an interpretation of a parable he told. Here, Jesus explains (only to his disciples) that there are those who will not understand the announced coming of God's kingdom and thus be lost (those represented by the path). Others will hear the Word and receive it joyfully but only superficially, falling away at the first sign of trouble (the rocky ground). Still others, burdened by the "worries of the world" and the "deceitfulness of wealth" will simply ignore the coming of God's kingdom and be lost (the ground among the thorn bushes). But, there will be those who will hear Jesus' word and understand it, bearing fruit and yielding an unimaginable harvest for God. They are the good soil. Jesus challenges his disciples to consider what sort of soil they provide for God's word.

Seasons of the Soil²

Inevitably, we read this parable and ask ourselves, "Which soil am I?," understanding the parable to be about different types of people. Kalas turns the parable on its side and urges us to consider the soils as different seasons in our life. From youthful enthusiasm that is an inch deep and fades away, to the pressures and temptations of early adulthood that pull us away from church. I had never thought of the parable in terms of the seasons in my own life. You might re-read it with these seasons in mind.

Sticky Faith is all about helping to create good soil that is rich, deep, and enduring. I hope you'll consider reading *Sticky Faith*. We all have a stake in the faith of future generations. It is the work of us all.

¹ Powell, Kara. *Sticky Faith* (pp. 15-16). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

² This section title is from *Parables from the Back Side*, Ellsworth Kalas. Abingdon Press, 1992.

Daily Bible Readings

More on parables and the parable of the sower

Monday, Isaiah 55:6-13 A call to repentance and rejoicing. Look for the sower.

Tuesday, Mark:4-20 Mark's telling of the Parable of the Sower

Wednesday, Luke's 8:4-15 Luke's version of the parable. Compare the three versions.

Thursday, Matthew 13:10-17 Jesus talks about the purpose of the parables.

Friday, Matthew 13:31-43 Jesus again talks about the use of parables, after telling the parables of the mustard and the yeast.

Saturday, Matthew 13:44-53 Three more brief parables. What do you think Jesus is saying?

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

We are studying key portions of Isaiah.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Beginning August 19: A study of the book of Revelation

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the parables of Jesus.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

Beginning August 20: A study of Paul's letter to the Romans

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Smith Worship Center

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Beginning this Sunday, August 11: *How the West Was Won: from Pagan to Christian*

Video of each week's class is posted here: vimeo.com/groups/scottsbiblestudy