

**“A SOWER WENT OUT TO SOW”**

**HOLINESS  
REV. TED WOOD  
September 12, 2014**

**Ted:** The Lord be with you.

**Men:** And also with you.

**Ted:** Let us pray. The LORD sits enthroned forever. He has established His throne for justice. He judges the world with righteousness; He judges the people with uprightness. The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, and a stronghold in times of trouble. And those who know Your name put their trust in You, for You, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Men:** Amen.

**Ted:** Great. Well, if you had a child, my daughter got married, not last weekend, but the weekend before. And this is a point of interest. The premarital counseling, And the service, in part, and the wedding sermon in whole, was done by the Rev. Gordon Green, who was a pastor at Christ Church at Grove Farm, and he hit a home run with all the parts that he was participating in. And it was interesting to watch all those 20-somethings in the bridal party in rapt attention to what he was saying. So he now works with Inter- varsity with medical and law graduate students at the University of Florida, which is his alma mater. But it was great to see him and Ruth and the rest.

How many of you have ever been to Grand Valley, Pa.? Thank you very much, bill, yes. Sig and I were in Grand Valley, Pa. last night, and we left there about six o’clock. We had a chance to present to a client, a potential feature client. The meeting went very well. Sig did a superb job. He took most of the lead on the presentation, which is the first time he’s done it. It was very encouraging to see how well it went, so praise the Lord for that.

For Grand Valley, Pa., you go to Tidisville, and then you drive northeast for about what, Sig, fifteen or twenty miles?

**Sig:** That’s all?

**Ted:** And it just gets in the middle. I mean, there are more bears than people there, and it just is-- (*Laughter.*) But it was a great meeting that we had.

**Participant:** I don’t think there’s anybody in Grand Valley that has enough money.

**Ted:** That part of Crawford County—which is it, Crawford or Warren County? I didn’t even know. Warren? There’s just a lot of rural poverty in that area.

Well, what I want to do is, I want to talk to you about one of my favorite stories. It has become one that I’ve really wrestled with a lot, and that’s the story of the parable of the sower. And I preached on this several weeks ago, and I just got so much into it. When Bruce said, “Why don’t you continue the series on holiness?”, I said, “Fine. I think I’m going to preach on the parable of the sower.” So I think he had anticipated that I told him that I would not carry on what he had been doing.

But what I want to do is that I want to read this parable to you, and then break it up, because it’s extremely important for us to understand the various types of persons we’re going to encounter as we go out and share our faith, and share our lives, the ministry God

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is already working within us. So let's start in Matthew 13, verse 1, and then we're going to go to verse 9, and we're going to skip over to verse 18. So you can just follow along. I'm reading in the ESV.

“That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about Him, so that He got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And He told them many things in parables, saying, “A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they had not much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil. For when the sun rose, they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. And he who has ears to hear, let him hear.”;”

Now on to verse 18. “Here then the parable of the sower. 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 has been sown along the path. 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. But when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among the 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. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit, then yields, in one case a hundredfold, and another sixty, and another thirty.”

“A sower went out to sow.”

This appears in Matthew 13, as I've said, but there are also parallel stories of the same parable in Luke 8 and Mark 4. And in Luke we're told that, immediately after this parable is told, that Jesus begins His great evangelistic effort. In Luke 9 He called the Twelve together, and sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God, and to heal. So, immediately after telling this parable in Luke, Jesus then sends out the Twelve. And then, in Luke 10, the very next chapter. “After the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of Him, two by two into every town, to the place where He Himself was about to go. And He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”

So what Jesus is doing is, He is telling this parable. And in this parable, He is telling us the people we're going to encounter, because He is telling the parable, and then He sends out the Twelve. In the next chapter, He sends out the Seventy-two. And then, what He is doing is that He is describing who the apostles, and who we are going to encounter as we go out and preach, the kinds of people who will end up in our churches. So this is very, very important for us to understand—the setting, and what we can anticipate is about to happen.

The sower is God. The seed is the Word. The soil is the human heart. And the plants are the various kinds of people the disciples will encounter, and that you and I will encounter.

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So as you think about this, and we listen and we meditate on this Word, we need to think about our loved ones, if we’re describing the different kinds of folks that we’re going to encounter, and will come into our churches, and that we’ll have a chance to share our faith with. We need to think about our loved ones, and our friends, those we work with, our colleagues, and indeed, we need to think about ourselves, to see where we indeed fall into that mix of the four kinds of soil.

So the first soil is what I call the *hard ground hearts*. And that appears in Matthew 13:18-19. It says that the birds gobbled up the seed on the hard ground. “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.” These are the people who hear the word, or see the witness, and don’t understand. They hear, but the Word doesn’t pierce their hearts. Their hearts are hard.

Now why are their hearts hard? Is it because they’re bad people? No, it’s because their hearts are hard by nature, like every one of our hearts before we were born again or regenerated, before we received the Spirit, before God took out our heart of stone and gave us a heart of flesh. Before that happened, every one of our hearts was as hard as that worn path. They are, by nature, hard to the things of God.

They are the people who are described in Romans the third chapter, beginning at the tenth verse to the eighteenth, where it says, (and you all know this), “None is righteous, no, not one. No one understands; no one seeks God. All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless. No one does good, not even one. . . . And there is no fear of God before their eyes.” This describes humanity as a whole, until God has regenerated them.

Jesus said that their problem is that they do not understand the Word. Now I found this Greek word for “understand” interesting, because it’s not a word that is normally used—*suniami*. And it’s made out of two words. New Testament Greek often puts two words together, a preposition and then a regular verb. *Ami* is the understanding part, but *sun* means “with,” or “together with.” We have that in English as well. We would say “summation,” or something like that. We have the same kind of lead word, a preposition. And what it can mean in Greek, another way of understanding this word, is “joined together in the mind.” It has the sense of joining together. The Word doesn’t make sense because the folks who hear it don’t pull it together with other things. It’s isolated in their thinking. It doesn’t fit their assumptions. It’s foolishness. They simply are not able to pull it all together in their heads.

I had a conversation the other day at a university with an academic, and he knows I’m a Christian. I talk about my faith, as is appropriate, and he came back to me. I could see him lying in wait for me for a while, and that’s fine. I love the encounters, because it gives us a chance to be more clear about what we believe, and to try to dispel some ignorance. But by the end of the conversation, he said, “Christianity begins with a myth and ends with a myth. It’s a myth created to control people. The church took the Bible and changed it, so that they could control people. People have advanced beyond these myths of Christianity, and now we’re at a better place.” At which point I pointed out all the atrocities of atheistic leaders in the twentieth century—Hitler and Stalin and

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Pol Pot and others, and he didn't want to think about that. That was simply an aberration. People generally weren't like that. And then, if we would get beyond the superstitious thinking, ...

It's interesting to note that early in Christian history, by about the second century, the Christians were being accused of a number of things, one of them that they were incestuous, because they called each other “brother” and “sister.” Another one is that they were cannibals because they ate the bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ, and they also were superstitious. Marcus Aurelius, in the movie “Gladiator,” the Roman emperor, was a great thinker. He wrote a book called *Meditations*, one of the great works of Roman philosophy. But he himself persecuted Christians because he said that Christians were superstitious, and they believed myths, and it's not good to be superstitious.

So my friend, who I was talking about, I knew enough to dismantle him. You know, He said, “Well, what about all these other gospels?”

And I said, “What do you mean? The Gospel of Thomas, the gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Judas? Which ones are you talking about?” And all he said was, “I've just stepped into a territory I don't know anything about.” But I didn't take advantage of that. But he thinks it's a great myth. So it doesn't make sense, because his mind doesn't pull it all together. And sadly, many Christians are in the same position. They get a little bit of this, they get a little bit of this, they get a little bit of this, they get a little bit of this, but none of it connects. And in the end, as I've seen in our Brave Men's group here, what I've seen is that there are men who can sit and listen to Bruce, (and nobody does a better job of unpacking the Scripture than Bruce does.) They sit and listen. They say, “Aha, boy, that was great! Wasn't that a great session, Ted?” And they go out, and they say something totally contrary to what has been taught, totally inconsistent with the message that Bruce has laid out. And that's because what Bruce is teaching is not connected to what they think, or their assumptions, or their prejudices, or whatever they were taught in Sunday school, or by their other preacher. So we have that problem. So that's the seed that fell on hard ground. Those are the hard ground hearts.

The second kind of persons that we're going to encounter are the *rocky ground hearts*. This is the one who hears the Word, who “immediately receives it with joy. Yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while. But when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.” And the Greek word for “fall away,” is *scandalon*, which means “stumbles.” This person springs up quickly in the Word, in the faith. The Word starts to grow, but the sun comes up, scorches and withers the plant, because there is not much soil and not much water. The plant has no roots. The plant dies.

The person hears the good news and is thrilled. “Oh, Jesus died for my sins! And I accept Him as my personal Savior! I'm guaranteed a place in heaven! Oh, joy!”

But he has no root in himself. Nothing is sinking in, because his heart is so shallow. He's treading water. He's walking in the shallow end of the pool. He lasts, as the Scripture says, “only a short time.” And, as Luke tells us, “he believes for a while.” That's the expression Luke uses.

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True faith is to endure to the end. This one does not endure to the end. Jesus says three times in the Gospels, “He who endures to the end will be saved.” This one does not endure. He can’t stand the time of testing, as Luke says--the heat of trouble and persecution because of the Word. He says, “Okay, I’m saved. I’m going to heaven. Now what?” The thrill is gone. He’s not curious about the things of God. He does not find God fascinating.

I love what John Piper says about this. He talks about finding God “endlessly fascinating.” I want to know if that’s the way you feel. Do you find God endlessly fascinating? I find my wife endlessly fascinating because I can’t figure her out. (*Laughter.*) And I’m going to die not having figured her out. But the same thing goes for God. God, as Piper said, is endlessly fascinating! And I’m afraid that some of you here have said, “I’ve got it here, and I’m not going to think any further. I’m not going to think about the hard questions, or how it all fits together.”

One of the great things about Bruce is that he provokes us to think about these hard things. He (this person) does not spend time inwardly digesting the Word. You know the great prayer from the book of Common Prayer. It talks about the Word of God, “that we may read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Word of God.” This person is not inwardly digesting the Word because he doesn’t want to. He does not have a desire for the Word, and neither does he find God endlessly fascinating. He does not ask himself the hard questions. He keeps life in the shallow end of the pool. As it says in Romans, the third chapter, he does not seek God.

He comes to church. He joins the church. He is active for a while. He loses interest. He quits coming. His faith becomes a private matter. It’s between him and Jesus. He falls away because of hard times that come from the Word, because we know one thing for sure, that the Word is going to give you a hard time. If you’re in the Word, that Word will provoke you and agitate you, and like Jacob, at the brook of Jabbok, you will wrestle with god in that Word.

He finds that people in the church are not as nice as he thought they would be. He finds that people in the church say hurtful things. The pastor is insincere. The pastor does not recognize him. They change the music. He finds that people don’t come up and say hello to him, as they once did. He begins to bear a grudge. He keeps it in his heart. And the Word says, “How many times should I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”

“No, I tell you, but seventy times seven.”

I don’t like that. It’s not fair. The Word is too hard. And he falls away.

It’s interesting. My son Daniel has recently become the pastor of a Baptist church. He’s a Calvinist in a Baptist church. It’s tough sledding. But we were talking about this, and my son told me, “I have no altar calls at my church.” He says, “I want people to demonstrate that God has changed their lives, and then we should consider them for membership.”

“Do you accept Jesus?”

“Yes.”

“Come forward. You can become a member.”

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Daniel says, “No. You accept Jesus? Fine. Now start to live out the life, through faithful discipline—the Word, the sacraments, the fellowship, volunteering, being part of the fellowship. And then we’ll see if you’re really serious about this thing.”

The hardest thing about the split for me with the Episcopal church, when we Anglicans split with the Episcopal church, were the many who we thought were with us, who stumbled over God’s word and fell away—many who before the split took place. We said, “Oh surely they’ll be with us, as we establish the Anglican church of North America.” They didn’t go. There was too much of a sacrifice to be made.

Very sobering words from 1 John 2:19. “They went out from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”

So there are those who will appear to be saved, but will not, by their witness and their actions, stay with us, and they will fall away, because the Word is too hard.

*(A participant starts to ask a question. The nature of the question is unclear.)*

**Ted:** Taj, what I want to do is, I’m going to let you hold on to that, because I really want to get through this. Now that’s with everybody. I’m going to take that question, but do you understand? I’m going to roll right now, if you see me asleep or attentive, one or the other. But thank you, Taj.

Now the third is the *thorny ground hearts*. “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.”

The hard ground heart never gets started. The stony ground heart appears to get started, but indeed there is no root. There is not a true conversion.

Now, the thorny ground heart. Luke introduces the thorny ground heart by saying, “But as they go on their way,”—this is very interesting—“but as they go on *their* way.” As I go on *my* way, not the Lord’s way. As they go on their way, these things begin to happen.

Okay, it says that the cares of the world, which could also be translated “the worries and the anxieties of this age,” is their preoccupation. It sets for them their priorities and their needs for these people.

“The deceitfulness,” which can also be translated “the delusion”—the deceitfulness and delusion of riches. Mark adds “the desire for other things.” So all these thorns are pulling at the believer: worries, anxieties, the deceitfulness of riches, the delusion about riches. What riches can do for you, the desire for other things.

And Luke concludes, “pleasures.” Worries, anxieties, deceitfulness, delusions, desire for other things, pleasures. All of these things drag down the one who has the thorny ground heart.

It says that it chokes the Word in their hearts. And it’s interesting. Once again, we have these Greek words that have two parts to them, a preposition followed by a verb. It puts a bunch of consonants together. The word is sumpnignal, and it means “to choke by being joined together with something.”

So worries, anxieties, deceitfulness, delusions, desire for other things, pleasures. This person is joined together to the world. It starts to choke him. This person is choked by

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the world because he is still joined to the world. He is content. Life is good. He’s prospering. Jesus is his Savior. He has a home in heaven. He has friends, a nice church, people are friendly. Everything is sweet. He’s content with the world. Life is good, but he’s unfruitful.

This seed has roots. It’s alive, but it proves unfruitful. Luke says, “their fruit does not mature.” And the Greek word there is “to carry to the finish.” This kind of person is having a difficulty carrying on to the finish.

The thorny ground heart, is the fate—I’m sorry!—of many evangelicals in this country. Many evangelicals, which we would count ourselves as part of, no matter what church or denomination we’re a part of, have a thorny ground heart, because we uncritically take on the world’s values. We are joined together because the world starts to choke us, because we’re tied together with the world. We don’t see that there’s a problem. We have the world’s values of status, achievement, security, entertainment and leisure time, and our personal rights. It’s the American way of life, isn’t it? Bigger is better. You earned it; you deserve it. Show off your assets. If you’ve got it, flaunt it. It’s your money; you can do with it as you please, as long as you tithe. The rest is mine.

I remember talking with a client, and the woman was a very active Christian, an evangelical believer, and she had been talking about how she and her husband had been saving up money their whole lives to build their dream house. I thought, Dream house? “I am going to prepare for you a mansion.”

**Participant:** Amen.

**Ted:** That’s our dream house. I questioned her about it. She resisted my questions very strongly. She did not want to think that all her work was not going to take care of her dreams, in her saving.

I think that a value that we’ve lost amongst Christians, evangelicals especially, is the value of modesty and understatement. I look at that passage, (and I’m trying to find it; bear with me, brothers.) I don’t even think I put this down in my original notes. It’s the admonition of Paul to timothy, where he tells women to dress modestly, right? And not to wear a lot of jewelry, which is to show full attention to themselves, and flaunt worldly values to people.

Are you incensed when a woman who has assets flaunts them? Does it bother you? It certainly distracts me.

I was in a professional setting the other day, and I won’t go into a lot of detail. But I was in a professional setting. It was a medical setting, where I was being treated by a young woman who, like the Canaanite elders, was high and lifted up, and was flaunting it. (*Laughter.*)

**Participant:** Didn’t you just sit there?

**Ted:** No. I was distracted.

**Participant:** The words “bothered” and “distracted” are two very different things.

**Ted:** (*Pensive laughter.*) I was distracted and bothered. (*Laughter.*) But I’m saying that there was no modesty there. To me, it was totally inappropriate. And when I set up my next appointment, I said, “Can I get another person?” I told the one who was doing the appointment that I was distracted. I didn’t feel right in that setting.

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So you see that on stage. I’ve been in churches where a young woman would come up on stage to have prayers over her for a short term mission, and her skirt was halfway up the legs. That is flaunting; that’s not living modestly.

Now we apply that to women because we’re very visually stimulated. That’s the thing that gets us going. But do we also talk about living modestly in terms of the assets that we have in terms of our finances? There is something unseemly about one who is born again, who has been saved and is growing in the Spirit, there is something unseemly about having an ostentatious showing of prosperity.

And we’re called to live modestly, and not to take on the values of the world. We need to be very careful about the houses we build, the cars we drive, and the clothes we wear, as to what they say. Is it drawing attention to us, or is it drawing attention to Jesus? Modesty and understatement. We want the women to cover up, but we need to cover up too.

**Participant:** Is that in 1 Peter 3?

**Ted:** You know, I’m embarrassed. Oh yes, 1 Timothy 2:9. “I want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves not with elaborate hair styles or gold.”

I spend a lot of time in Erie on business, and I think about Bill Hurt, who is the CEO and chairman of the board of Erie Insurance, a magnificent man, who, when he died, left \$140 million to the city of Erie. He was probably worth \$800 million when he died, extremely wealthy. Erie Insurance has done very well over the years. But when you would go to see Bill, ... I’ve had him as the chairman of my campaigns. He would come up in kind of a rumpled suit. He drove Lincolns, but they were about five years old. He had a house, which is a large ranch style home, but decorated in the ‘70s. I thought I had gone into a time warp when I walked into his house. (*Laughter.*) And I had been to meetings where he was standing there with all the other dignitaries of the community, and you would never know that that man was close to a billion dollars. That man lived modestly, and his whole life was to live modestly. It was a powerful witness. That’s real class, and that’s real dignity.

So we evangelicals are in danger of becoming “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.” “Oh,” we say, “That’s the other people.” But if we become lovers of pleasure, of the values of the world, then we end up just like the world, and we become “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having an appearance of godliness.”

Here is a very sobering yet encouraging word from John 15, at the second verse. “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away. And every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear yet more fruit. I am the Vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me, you can do nothing.”

Here’s the good news. If you are the thorny ground heart, God will prune you, to take away the pleasures that you have, and the things of this world, so that you can become the fruitful person He wants you to be.



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You know, we tell lots of stories about Third World Christians, and how they have nothing. And isn't that wonderful? But not many of us are ready to do that, including myself. We need more teaching in our churches on this. I think pastors would rather not preach on it, because if they do, they'll drive out those who are giving the money. We need to have strong teaching about the dangers of riches, because, in the end, “The LORD gives, and the LORD takes away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.”

And finally, we get to the *good soil heart*. “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, and in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Now it's interesting, as you study this in Matthew, Mark and Luke, that each has a different word that they use to describe this hearer's heart—what this person hears, this good soil heart. What do they hear? In Matthew, Mark and Luke, each uses a different word, and it's very helpful to see the progression of how we grow and understand.

Matthew says that this person “understands the word,” the same word that was used in the beginning for the hard soil heart that doesn't understand. The hard soil heart can't pull it together. That doesn't make sense to him. There are too many different parts of it. This person understands the Word. In a sense, he gets it. He puts the parts together in his mind.

I remember, and I've shared this story. When I first came to trust in Christ in my freshman year in high school, the fellow who led me to Christ, Steve Gaskins, sat there, and he talked and talked and talked to me, and it was like all these little parts out there floating. It didn't all flow together. And then, all of a sudden, God gelled it together. And all of a sudden, I had the thought that occurred to me, that this is true! I mean, it wasn't logical. All at once it just gelled and pulled together. All the parts came together. I understood that what he was saying about the gospel was true.

Matthew says that this heart “understands the word.” Mark says, “He accepts it.” And the Greek word there has a sense of welcoming. So this person not only says, “Okay, I get it; the parts are coming together.” This person also accepts it. He welcomes it! “I welcome God's Word in my heart. This is something I want.” And finally, Luke says that he retains it. He holds on to it, another word for retain. He takes possession of it. So he understands it, he welcomes it, he takes possession of it. He gets the Word, he welcomes the Word, and he takes possession.

These are the descriptors of a fruitful, maturing Christian. And then Luke adds that the good soil heart “bears fruit with patience”—that you understand, welcome, and embrace, and you bear fruit over the long haul, because “he who endures to the end will be saved.”

Now there is more. I want to leave some time for discussion. I apologize for going so long. But any thoughts? Yes, Sig?

**Sig:** Taj had a question. I should let him go first.

**Ted:** Well, I think that Taj's question is very involved, and we've got only about five minutes. Sig, did you want to say something?

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**Taj:** Well, it’s simple. Jesus started with twelve disciples. (*Unclear.*) Then there were two thousand, then three thousand, then five thousand. Now we have about two billion Christians! It’s not all bad news. (*Unclear.*)

**Ted:** Right. But that’s only because of the grace of God. We have two billion Christians, if indeed all are Christians, because of the grace of God. But men don’t start off that way. They start off with hard hearts, because they don’t understand. And you can’t make them understand. Steve could have talked to me until he was blue in the face, unless God had given the grace to pull the parts together. And all of a sudden, it was, “Oh, my gosh, this is true.” And then the next realization, which came immediately after that, was “This is about me! This is a call to me! This is a truth that I have to decide as to whether I want to accept it or not.” And God gave me the grace to do that. Yes, Sig?

**Sig:** So my question to that point is that I’ve heard people like yourself who are more well trained in theology than I am, that they look at this parable as man throwing the seeds, because they are excited about the word of God, whereas a farmer would take more time to plant it in good soil all the time. No one throws seeds on the sidewalk, so to speak. I don’t know what’s actually the word of God, but without God opening our eyes, and our ears, it doesn’t matter where we plant the seed, right?

**Ted:** Well that would be true. But I know that there are many ways of interpreting this. I was just giving you my take on it.

**Sig:** Right.

**Ted:** I mean, I’m not saying that’s not true. I’m just saying that I decided not to go there.

**Sig:** But is there a part in the parable that says that the sower is God, and the seed is the Word?

**Ted:** I believe that in one of the translations it says that.

**Sig:** Okay.

**Ted:** Yes, Bill?

**Bill:** In Israel, they still sow seed the same way. (*Unclear.*) It’s created by a pathway. (*Unclear.*) Some seed falls on the pathway. Some falls on good soil, but thorns grow up along the walls. So it’s an agricultural illustration which Jesus took right out of the context of the life of Israel. And the second thing I say is that, from my experience, I’ve found people who listen and listen, but do not understand until, somewhere along the line, God in His grace appears or comes to them.

**Ted:** That’s the point. Yes?

**Participant:** You know, I’m always looking for a Scripture to verify what we’re saying. We’re talking about people who can’t pull it all together. If we look at 1 Corinthians 1, basically the first chapter, specifically in verse 23, it talks about, “for the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” And 1 Corinthians 2:14. I don’t have it memorized. Sorry. But it’s something along the lines of (*paraphrase*): “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, but they are folly to him. And he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

**Ted:** Yes. Could you read that again, because that is a very important passage.

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**Participant:** Yes. 1 Corinthians 2:14. “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him. He is not able to understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” So as we’re out there witnessing, we can’t get upset whenever the people say, “This is foolishness.” We should actually agree with them. “You’re right.” (*Laughter.*) “As a matter of fact, Scripture says that you’re supposed to believe that.”

**Second Participant:** First comes life, then comes understanding.

**Ted:** Right. That’s right. Absolutely right. Yes. So, somewhere along the line, God had to touch me so it all gelled, and I said, “Oh, my gosh!”

I think, (and I’ve said this a number of times before), I think that it’s important, as we look at the things that are going on in the world and in our own nation, that many of us get very upset about these things. And I would say to you, What do you expect? The natural man does not accept the things of the spirit. ISIS is acting naturally when it does its thing. Now, in the end, Satan consumes himself, because that in turn will lead to more and more evil. But, nonetheless, you’ve got to remember that, when you get upset, are you getting upset with people who are not able to receive the things of the Spirit? Yes?

**Participant:** How about those that have received, but then they were really into this, like, in the church, and believing, and now they say that it’s a fantasy. They don’t really live it, and they kind of reject—

**Ted:** I can’t judge that person, but I think that’s very unnerving. To me, they may very easily be the ground that fell on the stones. They spring up. “I love it! I’m so glad I’m saved! I’ve got a home in heaven! I joined the church. I was active. I got discouraged. I fell away. I died.”

**Participant:** This friend of mine I’ve known for eight years. Yesterday he was telling me about all these troubles. I started praying with him, and he said, “Randy, just be yourself,” like I was doing something really—

**Ted:** Odd?

**Participant:** Yes.

**Ted:** I mean, we can’t judge, in the end. I think about my own life. Recently I took my wife (*unclear*) when I was a runner, I put (*unclear*) in the track, like a quarter mile track, you know? And I broke it into segments. And I think I went off into a great start, and then, about the second quarter of the run, it was like, you know, you’re supposed to be running this way, and I started going like this, you know, around the track, and bouncing backwards. I never left the track. But if someone were to look at me, ... I remember the great words to me in 1981, when Father Bob Brockert said, “I think god is going to run out of patience with you.” I know theologically that’s not correct, but it was very sobering, because there is a God to be feared, and when the race is going that way, you can’t spend your time kind of wandering around and taking your leisure. There is a race, and by the grace of god I’ve been able to stay on the course in moving ahead in that race. And I pray that, by the grace of god, I’ll endure to the end. Yes, bill?

**Bill:** You just said that the desire for god produces fear. At the beginning, you identified love. (*Unclear.*) Fear comes first. Respect and awe come first.

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**Ted:** I think that I want to return to one last thing before we leave, and that is this. I want you all to think very seriously about the seed that fell on thorny ground, because, as I read that, I thought to myself, That is the church in America. The delusions and the deceit of riches, the desire for other things, the desire for pleasure. We are totally sidetracked in our faith, and the result is that we can see it statistically by the number of people that are indeed converted as a percentage of the population. We’re at a standstill for the last forty years.

Now when you hear about what’s going on in Nigeria, how at the last Provincial Assembly of the Anglican church in Nigeria they added twenty new dioceses, and each diocese has three hundred thousand people. Now, are all of those Christians? I don’t know. But they admitted, or baptized, or confirmed three hundred thousand in twenty different places.

Now think about that. And these people have nothing! And we say, “Oh, isn’t that great! Oh, that’s so inspiring!” but we don’t want to go there, because we don’t want the cost. Yes?

**Participant:** Yes. It’s funny that you say that, Ted. It would be a pleasure to hear from other folks here who are Christ church folks. But I was walking in and talking with Sig on my way in. I live in McKees Rocks, apparently the crime capital of Pittsburgh, and I was just looking at the opulence of this church. And to think that kids have got I don’t know how many TVs that they need, that it’s critical for them to have in their youth room. And I haven’t been here in a while, but they used to have a latte bar, and pool tables in a kids’ room in a church. Based on the issues that I see, day to day, in the community that I live in, it just feeds that whole thing of seeds falling on thorny ground.

**Ted:** Yes. Don’t worry. You’re going to heaven, those of you who are on thorny ground, and I include myself in there. But you’re not going to be very fruitful. What?

**Participant:** Are you sure they’re going to heaven?

**Ted:** What? Okay—

**Participant:** I’m not so sure that the parable suggests that they’re going to heaven.

**Ted:** Okay. Fair enough, Bishop.

**Participant:** I think it’s a warning. Ultimately, something is going to capture your heart. You can’t live that divided way all your life long.

**Ted:** You’re choked by the things you’re tied to. Yes?

**Participant:** You have a very strong mind.

**Ted:** I can’t help it. I was born that way.

**Participant:** Yes. But how is this a guide for the person who is retarded, or mentally disabled, challenged, or whatever? How does that fall on them?

**Ted:** In terms of what they understand?

**Participant:** What they understand, and what they do with it. Their hearts are still—

**Ted:** Absolutely right. That’s correct. There are people who are, by their mental makeup, just not able to go very deeply into this. I understand that. But the problem I see is not with those, which are the exception. The problem is with those who don’t want to think about all the hard questions. I mean, to me, the hardest question I’ve had to deal with recently is forgiving people, because I’m supposed to forgive them seven times

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seventy. And I say to god, “That’s outrageous! That is too much to expect of me! Those people are wrong! I need to withhold from them my forgiveness!” Doesn’t that seem right? I mean, that’s just, wouldn’t you say?

**Participant:** It will eat you up.

**Ted:** Well, it will eat you up, but then the thing is, you have to say, “Okay, God, okay.” Do you want the Lord to deal with you in that way?

**Participant:** Amen.

**Ted:** Yes?

**Participant:** I think with Rob’s question, I’ve thought before, just even thinking that this person who is mentally disabled, and thinking about the struggles that I have, not having peace and joy, but also, thinking about that person who is mentally disabled, that God created him, and I believe that’s one of those things where Paul said that we need to let God be God, in the mystery of how He takes care of His children in regard to them understanding the Lord.

**Ted:** Well, it looks like this has been a joyful time together, hasn’t it?

**Men:** Yes, it has.

**Ted:** I probably could end with a joke. There was a minister, a rabbi and a priest. Oh, I better not tell you that one! (*Laughter.*)

Let us pray. Lord god, let us take the word that you have given. Let us not have thorny hearts. Let us have hearts of good soil. Give us the grace to grow and be fruitful, for Your sake. And we pray this in Your name. Amen. (*Applause.*)