

WHAT THE "GOOD SOIL" NEEDS TO STAY HEALTHY

Elements of Healthy Soil: Luke 13:6-9

February 20, 2022

Then [Jesus] told this parable: A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any.

So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, "For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?" "Sir," the man replied, "leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down."

Luke 13:6-9

"But the seed on the good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

Luke 8:15

Some ideas for reading parables

1. Parables are not allegories – focus on the main point
2. The ending matters – pay special attention to the tension at the conclusion
3. Parables often explain themselves – context matters

What does this soil amending look like?

⁸ " 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.' "

Luke 13

1. The "vineyard worker" really cares about this tree
2. The timing adds to the tension in this parable – we don't know another tree's story
3. [Allegory alert!] The "vineyard worker" has two jobs:

-- dig around: _____

-- fertilize: _____

Starting with what has to be removed

¹¹ “This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. ¹² Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. ¹³ Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. ¹⁴ The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.

Luke 8:11-14

1. A conscientious farmer doesn’t ignore difficult soil
2. Removing the rocks and weeds is necessary, but only the starting point for healthy soil

A deeper study of healthy soils

Centrality of the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16)

Life transforming walk with Jesus (John 3:3, 30; Phil. 1:6)

Intentional evangelism (Matthew 28:18-20)

Transforming communities through active compassion, mercy, and justice ministries (Micah 6:8)

Global perspective and engagement (Acts 1:8)

Compelling Christian community (Acts 2:42-47)

Heartfelt worship (Psalm 138:1a; John 4:23)

Sacrificial and generous living and giving (Romans 12:1-8)

Culture of godly leadership (Hebrews 13:7)

Fruitful Organizational Structures (Acts 6:1-7; Exodus 18:13-26)

1. Congregational vitality starts with studying healthy systems (or, in this parable, healthy soils!)
2. Key question: How is the farmer going to evaluate the health of his fig tree?

Our health question: _____

3. The content and the order of these Ten Missional Markers are important

Organic lessons for healthy soils and fruitful trees

1. Congregational Vitality and healthy soils puts us in the arena of wisdom

- ¹ *Blessed is the man
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers.*
- ² *But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.*
- ³ *He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.*

Psalm 1

2. Grateful trees don't presume on grace

²² *Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. ²³ And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!*"

Romans 11

3. God has great plans for his new tree!

²² " *This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. ²³ On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches. ²⁴ All the trees of the field will know that I the LORD bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish.*

" 'I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.' "

Ezekiel 17

Resources for studying Luke 13

Bible.org has some wonderful resources at <https://bible.org/book/Luke>

I. Howard Marshall's Greek commentary is the text is very helpful (Paternoster Press, 1978)

Bob Deffinbaugh's sermon on this text is at <https://bible.org/seriespage/problem-perspective-luke-131-21>

I appreciate J.C. Ryle's commentary on Luke 13 at <https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/l13.htm>

Spurgeon has a classic sermon on this text at [https://www.spurgeongems.org > chs650](https://www.spurgeongems.org/chs650)

The ECC's Vitality material at <https://covchurch.org/vitality/healthy-missional-markers/> has a helpful description of the

Metrics that Matter: How to measure a healthy missional church

It is hard to measure spirituality. Some say it is even unwise to do so. Yet when we look at the New Testament, the disciples are coaching churches forward. They are using a frame of reference of what a vital congregation looks like.

Jesus himself is speaking to the churches in Revelation (chapters 2 and 3) about their own strengths and weaknesses. One of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is to guide churches into telling the truth about themselves, not just telling the truth about Jesus. In the Bible, evaluation is normal and natural.

Although there is no perfect list that describes a healthy missional church, we in the Covenant are using the ten healthy missional markers. By "healthy" we mean *pursuing Christ*. By "missional" we mean *pursuing Christ's priorities in the world*. It is our fervent prayer that every Covenant church becomes a healthy missional church. These markers help us to listen to the Holy Spirit...so that our ears are open to what Jesus is saying to each church.

For help in reading parables, I liked these short articles:

<https://unlockingthebible.org/2013/07/10-tips-for-understanding-jesus-parables/>

<https://www.ligonier.org/posts/interpreting-parables-of-jesus>

<https://www.olivetree.com/blog/how-to-read-a-parable/>

Earl Palmer's *Laughter In Heaven* (Word, 1987) is a wonderful place to start with the parables.