

SOIL ANALYSIS

Beginning in Beginnings: Luke 13:6-9

February 13, 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

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

It's all about the soil

"A farmer went out to sow his seed. . . ."

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 his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. ²² The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

Matthew 13:1-23

1. God does the sowing and sends the rain, but there is still work to be done
2. The test of the soils takes time
3. The seed is the "message of the kingdom" (see Romans 10) which must be received

What the context tells us

⁵ “I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”
Then he told this parable

Luke 13:5-6

1. Jesus’ original audience needed a shocking change of perspective
2. This parable is the object lesson of a serious call to self-examination

A theology of fruit

⁴³ “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. ⁴⁴ Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. ⁴⁵ The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

Luke 6

⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

John 15

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Galatians 5

Q 86. Since we have been delivered from our misery by grace through Christ without any merit of our own, why then should we do good works?

A. Because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, is also restoring us by his Spirit into his image,

so that with our whole lives we may show that we are thankful to God for his benefits,
so that he may be praised through us,
so that we may be assured of our faith by its fruits,
and so that by our godly living our neighbors may be won over to Christ.

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 32

1. The fig tree’s DNA is already programmed to bear fruit – it just has to be nourished
2. Pastor Fakkema thinks Lord’s Day 32 has a great description of fruit!

From biology to mission – elements of healthy soil

1. What spiritual manure looks like

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)

Church Vitality's 10 Missional Markers

2. Who is the “P”?

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

3. I can start with what to remove from the soil: rocks and weeds

²⁰ *The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. ²² The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.*

Matthew 13

Resources for the

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.