



Life of Christ

A study of the life and teachings of Jesus

The Four Soils

—by Rose Dudley

In Matthew 7:16-20, Jesus tells His disciples, “You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? So every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.”

Bearing fruit seems pretty simple when your only choices are to be a healthy plant or a diseased plant; but if you’re not a very good gardener, you’ll quickly learn that it’s not quite that easy. To my list of life accomplishments, I’d proudly like to add “Person Who Has Killed the Most Plants.” It isn’t from a lack of trying. I have even killed snake plants, aloe vera, succulents—the kind of plants that live in unlivable climates. At first, it was because I overwatered or plain just forgot about them. Eventually, I even had friends coaching me through the process. But I learned over time that my green thumb was truly a black thumb of death.

After killing countless plant friends, I’d all but given up. That’s when a friend gave me a beautiful philodendron for my birthday. I couldn’t let her down. I researched how to take care of it and was absolutely determined to do it right this time. I watered it on the right days and got it the proper amount of sun. But I’m not joking. It was still dying. The leaves fell off one by one, no matter what I did. I felt terrible.

By the time the philodendron wilted down to nothing but a brown nub, I’d finally realized the root of my problem (no pun intended). It wasn’t my watering habits or how much sun I gave it. It wasn’t about how much I

controlled the environment around it or the massive pot I put it in to have plenty of room to grow. I was missing a crucial ingredient: apparently, when you purchase new plants, they need new soil.

As Marc Turnage noted in the Parable of the Four Soils in Luke 8:4-15, it's essential to know that we are not the seeds nor the sower. We are the soil. The Word is the seed, and while it has the power to transform us, sanctify us, and help us live righteously, it is entirely up to us to choose to accept that gift. For the Word to flourish inside us and then show outwardly, we have to let it "take root" in our lives.

While I could control how big the pot my plant was in just as well as I can control my surroundings, the company I keep, and what my work environment is, all of those things have no impact on how deeply God's Word digs into my heart. I might look good in my new digs, but ultimately nothing will flourish if I'm not reading the Word and genuinely applying it to my life.

The Parable of the Four Soils gives us examples of what to do and what not to do, and we've all experienced one or more of these soils in our pots at some point:

1. The path represents those who hear and are ignorant of the Word, who close themselves off to it.
2. The rocky places represent those who encounter the Word and are delighted by it, but when worry or trouble that requires big faith comes, they fall away easily because they haven't built up firm roots in the Word to support that required faith.
3. The thorns are those who hear the Word but allow the worries of the world and desire for earthly things choke out any fruitfulness they could have from what they heard.
4. The good soil represents those who hear the Word, honestly believe it, and apply it to their lives.

So, how do we become good soil? I won't give you an answer quite as simple as "read your Bible," but maybe one adjacent to it: believe the Bible! When God says that He called you by name, believe it. When He tells us to love Him above all and love our neighbors who are like us, believe that this is His top priority. When the Word says you could "understand all mysteries and perform miracles, but without love still be nothing," believe it. When He calls you "redeemed," believe it.

We must read and apply, but we must also believe the Word as truth to allow it to dig deep roots. It isn't a fable or a history book, though it records many people's history and incredible stories. It is a testimony to you and for you, to help you know God and His immense love for His creation. It is worth

reading, believing, and applying. When you start to see that all of those beautiful promises, those moments of redemption and sacrifice, were meant for you, good soil becomes an inevitability, thereby producing good fruit.

Question How have the words of Jesus produced life and fruit in your heart lately?

Family Chat What kind of “soil” or heart do you have?

Take Action Find a way to demonstrate the generous heart produced by being good soil. Reach out to someone in need today.