

## 20260215 Fields to Yields

By Dr John Tan

Most, if not all of us have heard of the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8). We have been told that God's word was planted, much like seeds, into our hearts and that the outcomes have been rather varied. This is what is written in Matthew 13.

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

What I want to do this morning is to consider the matter of the soil – we will take a quick look at the bad soil (which yields nothing or nothing that lasts anyway), but what I really want to do is to concentrate on the good soil. The reason is that even in the good soil you there is a range of outcomes or yields (30-fold, 60-fold and 100-fold of what was sown). What I want to focus on are what are the reasons for the discrepancy in the yields and to see if there are areas in our lives that we can work on for yield increase. Remember that the Lord says that it is good soil – but even in the area of good soil, there is a discrepancy in yield – and that is something that has intrigued me. And knowing the state of your soil, in this case, your spiritual soil, is paramount to the yield potential of the soil.

### **The poor soil**

Let's start with the matter of the poor soil. The seed (or the Word) is planted in our hearts, but nothing grows. Among the reasons for this poorness of soil is that these folks have complaining hearts. These are the people who engage in faithless complaining. Reasons for faithless complaining include self-centeredness, pride, unbelief, ingratitude, always comparing ourselves with others and fear.

We all know of friends who fall into this category of being poor soil. I personally know of many people who joyfully accepted the Lord as their Savior only to give Him up at the first sign of trouble. For them, being a Christian is about 'what is in it for me' – this is self-centeredness. Part of the reason is that sometimes the message of the gospel that they hear is so watered down that it was bound to happen. We tell people to believe in the Lord Jesus and all your troubles will disappear, when in reality, quite often believing in the Lord Jesus could actually bring about persecution and trouble.

Then of course there is the problem of unbelief and ingratitude.

These are just some quick examples of poor soil and as I have indicated, I do not want to spend my time here. What I want to do for the rest of this session is to look at the yields that can be seen with the good soil and to ask ourselves just how is it that we might move from 30-fold to 60-fold and thence to 100-fold.

### **The good soil**

What I want to do now is to look at the good soil. I want to consider why it is that there is that range of yield and then investigate one or two aspects of how we might live the Christian life in order to be the good soil with the high yield.

It is quite possible that the differences in yields could be attributed to things like variations in experience and maturity, differences in our levels of submission and obedience to the Lord and so on.

Another area that affects the yield of the crop is in the area of submission and obedience to the Lord. I recently read a book about a Cambodian gentleman called Sokreaksa Himm. Sokreaksa was one of those who lived and survived the horrors of Pol Pot's brutal Khmer Rouge regime. Sokreaksa's family members were butchered by the Khmer Rouge and the dead bodies of some of his family members were even piled upon him. Sokreaksa managed to survive this ordeal and eventually escaped Cambodia and went to Canada. He found new life in the Lord but confessed that it was impossible for him to extend forgiveness to those who had murdered his family. This lack of forgiveness on his part affected his ministry. It was only after Sokreaksa learned how to forgive that his ministry would show the higher yields, i.e., the 60- and the 100-fold.

So then, what are some of the things that we need to work on so that we might have better yields for the Lord, so that the spiritual fruit that we produce is larger?

Before I address that question, I would like to bring to your attention the words of the Lord in Matthew 22:37. In verse 36 Jesus was tested by the Pharisees and one of them asked the Lord saying 'teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' The Lord, in verse 37 answered 'Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind'. Wonder why we are to love the Lord with all our minds? Let's take a look at the matter of the mind and how this can change the spiritual yield.

Before we go any further, let me recount some management studies that was done between 1927 and 1932 in what was famously known as the Hawthorne studies. These studies show that a person's productivity is affected by how that person feels. When people are happy, when they are thinking in a positive manner, they do better and when they do the opposite in their thinking, then productivity actually goes down, or at best, just stays the same.

So then, what is the link between our minds and getting higher yields?

Let us now look at what scripture has to say this matter. We start by looking at 1 Thessalonians 5: 16 – 18: These four verses actually tell us how to get greater yields for the Lord. We are told to (a) rejoice always, (b) pray continually and (c) give thanks in all circumstances. These three things are like fertilizer for soil, and they all have to do with the mind. But how is it possible to rejoice always, to give thanks in all circumstances, especially if the circumstances are dire, or when we feel betrayed or let down by people? Let me recount for you how some people have been able to rejoice and to give thanks even in unhappy circumstances.

The first example has to do with a famous English Bible scholar named Matthew Henry. You might have heard of a book that he wrote - the Matthew Henry's Commentary on the whole Bible. This is a renowned, comprehensive verse-by-verse exposition of the entire Bible which is focused on application. Matthew was once attacked by thieves and robbed of his purse. After this incident, he wrote these words in his diary: "Let me be thankful. First, I was never robbed before. Second, although they took my purse, they didn't take my life. Third, although they took my all, it was not much. Fourth, let me be thankful because it was I who was robbed and not I who did the robbing."

This is a convicting and true account. How many of us can really look at difficulties in this way with thankful hearts? Yet the Bible says, "In everything give thanks (1Thessalonians 5:18). Thankfulness isn't our usual response when something goes wrong. We may have a hundred good things to be thankful for—but let one bad thing happen, and it's all we think about! Our minds would dwell on the negative. What we need to do is to ask the Holy Spirit to train our minds to look at His plan in all the situations that we have to undergo.

No matter what happens, we are to give thanks. We must develop a habit of thanking God each day. Does He expect us to thank Him that we've received a bad health diagnosis? Not at all, but He does want us to thank Him for being with us through our journey—every step of the way. He wants us to practice the H A B I T of praise and being thankful.

Thanking God for every blessing is a good place to start; it will take a while to get through all the goodness God has provided. Most of all, we should thank Him daily for what Jesus has done for us, to be watchful and mindful that the Lord is near to those who call on His name (Romans 10:13 – for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved).

The next example that I would like us to consider is the song 'Give thanks with a grateful heart'. This song was composed by Henry Smith in 1978. At that time, Henry Smith was unemployed and was suffering from declining vision which eventually led to his becoming legally blind. Smith was inspired

by the words of 2 Cor 8:9 – ‘for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich’. The song is about making a conscious choice to express gratitude and to find strength in difficult times.

Let me give you one last example and this is something that I heard from someone else. This has to do with Joseph. He was sold off by his brothers and he became a slave. This was really tough as he was from a rather privileged family and was the favorite son. Then as a slave he was brought into Potiphar’s family where he was subsequently seduced by Potiphar’s wife. Joseph rejected that seduction and he was thrown into jail. In jail he interpreted the dreams of some of his inmates and later on even Pharaoh’s dream and he eventually rose to become the Prime Minister of Egypt. If any of the first three things had happened to us, we would have grumbled and complained and harangued God. But it would appear that Joseph remained true and faithful to the precepts of God (remember he had no scriptures to remind him of what the ‘Christian’ life should be. Yet he trained his mind and he resolved in his heart to always be thankful. Not only did he become the prime minister of the land, but he was also reunited with his family. One really has to ask, what was it that Joseph relied on to remain faithful. (This reminds of Kim Tan’s burning bridges testimony).

Of course, it is so much easier to gripe and complain rather than to look up to heaven that thank the Lord. Recall the Israelites having left Egypt – complaining all the time. God sees it as an offense, a lack of trust in him and the consequences can be very dire. But we sometimes complain by disguising the complaining and whining as though it was a matter of care. But what we need to do is to ask the Holy Spirit to help us to transform our minds (Romans 12:1) and to cause us to turn our eyes, and our hearts upon Jesus.

Loving the Lord with all your mind means that we are to intentionally dedicate our intellect, our thoughts, and to make a conscious effort at desiring to know, to understand, to honor and to thank the Lord. It involves filling our minds with Scripture, meditating on His character, and using our reasoning abilities to serve Him rather than being conformed to worldly thinking. We are to actively engagement in deepening our knowledge of the most high. We are to surrender the way that we think and reason to the Lord and let Him work His ways through us. For by doing so, we move from a 30-fold yield to a 60-fold yield and to a 100-fold yield. If I could be so bold as to merge scripture, then perhaps it would be something like this:

‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, **with all thy mind** for by doing so, you will produce a crop, thirty times, sixty times, a hundred times what was sown’.

The question is, do we really want to do so?