

28: SOIL YOURSELF! (Luke 8:1-15)

1 Afterward (Jesus) was traveling from one town and village to another, preaching and telling the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, *2* and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary, called Magdalene (seven demons had come out of her); *3* Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward; Susanna; and many others who were supporting them from their possessions. (Luke 8:1-3)

In 8:1-3, unique to Luke, the Evangelist noted the work of three women of faith. As Jesus ministered, he drew followers who came from a wide variety of backgrounds. Mary Magdalene served after having seven demons exorcized by Jesus. Joanna, as the wife of Herod's steward Cuza, gave evidence that Jesus' message had reached even into the palaces of Rome. When these and other women came to faith, they immediately gave of their resources to enable Jesus' ministry to continue. This note is important, since the passage makes clear that those contributing to Jesus' ministry span both gender diversity and the social scale. The pattern of grace received and ministry pursued emerges in the exemplary response of these women. Their ministry came at two levels: personal involvement and the contribution of resources. Both levels of involvement were and are important to effective ministry.¹

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Jesus dwelled on the margins of both the Israelite religious and Roman secular societies of His day. Having devoted disciples who were women financially supporting Him was truly radical. Having His closest female disciple being a person who had had seven demons driven out of her and was then in her right mind was truly wild. Having women who supported Him financially who were connected to the corrupt power structures of Rome was likely covert, risky business as well! He drew so many to Himself on so many levels!

And these women secretly loved Jesus- where were their spouses at, if they had them? Jesus's words rang true here;

34 *Don't assume that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I came to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; 36 and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. 37 The one who loves a father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; the one who loves a son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Anyone who finds his life will lose it, and anyone who loses his life because of me will find it. (Matt. 10:34-39)*

I sure wish that more entire households followed Jesus together! It saddens me that one person out of a household follows Him and then faces pressure to deny Him at home. It saddens me that one person out of a household gets deeply connected to a Church community and then feels pulled away from it constantly in their home. This is my initial experience as a follower of Christ. I grew up in an agnostic home, and began pursuing spiritual matters and eventually full on faith in Christ between the ages of 18-20, and didn't have support at home until I saw my Dad come to faith when I was 25. Those five years were tough. If you're there right now I feel you!

And to those spouses who reject Jesus and/or the Church, or just keep a lukewarm, nominal or hypocritical relationship with Jesus and/or the Church while the other spouse chases after Jesus- please understand how tough you're making it for your spouse! If you're resistant, and your kids are hungry for Christ, the Word, and community and connection with the Body of Christ- you're a stumbling block to them. Oh how I'm praying that more full households would come to faith! With humans this might be impossible in some situations, but with God all things are possible!

These women gave to Jesus financially to support what He was doing as the Messianic missionary He was!

This begs us to ponder on the reality of all ministries needing finances. In dealing with ministry and resources, we can champion two equally dangerous imbalances.

(1) We can look at ministry as simply a matter of throwing money at a need. But ministry without heart, even well-financed ministry, is not ministry in God's eyes. A ministry can possess the best equipment, the finest quality of buildings, and the largest email list and social media following, and still not be doing God's work with quality if people do not remain more important. Excellence defined by standards of appearance is not excellence in God's eyes. Organizations lose effectiveness in their testimony because they developed a reputation for caring more about programs and buildings than people. Then there are ministries, especially in the poorer countries and areas of the world, where the buildings and facilities leave much to be desired, but the heart is in the ministry so that people are cared for as a matter of priority. Throwing money at a ministry and paying others to do the church's work while making it look nice is not ministry in God's sight.

(2) The opposite error is to argue that resources do not matter and are best left undiscussed. This passage, Jesus' discussion of the widow's mite in 21:1 - 4, and Paul's discussions of resources (see 1 Cor. 16:1 - 4; 2 Cor. 8 - 9; 1 Tim. 6) show that money is an important aspect of ministerial stewardship for the believer. The minister is worthy of his wage, and so are those organizations that serve the church. Those who receive grace should render grace in return (1 Cor. 9:11). Furthermore, too often a subtle attitude exists towards those in the ministry: I can expect the best for my family, but my pastor must live in a way that leaves him totally dependent on God. This subtle double standard is not biblical. All of us should be generous, and if the Old Testament is any guide, those who minister in the temple should be well provided for, so they can concentrate on the task of ministry. One of the reasons Jesus and the Twelve were so effective in their ministry was because disciples like these women stood totally behind their ministries.²

All that to say, feel free to give however you feel led to give towards the mission at Streetlight Community Church at [https://streetlight.life/giving/!](https://streetlight.life/giving/) 😊 We're doing good work in Kenmore and Akron that you can be confident in as a Body of Missionary Disciples! Plus, if you're a consistent part of our community and come, it's just biblically right and good to consistently give what you're prayerfully able to give!

Back to the text- As Jesus gathered disciples and gained opposition, the question about how people responded to his message surfaced.³

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Now I have to say, as someone who is wired more by Jesus to reach people outside of the Church and challenge people inside of the Church (more of a five-fold “apostle/evangelist/prophet” than a shepherd/teacher (Eph. 4:1-16)), I definitely resonate with the opposition that Jesus faced. I’m not saying that following Jesus is to be a constant ministry of rejection- cult leaders and fundamentalists believe that. But I am saying that where the challenge of Jesus through the ministry of the Holy Spirit exists, there will be opposition and rejection at times. Jesus speaks to this reality in the parable of the sower/soils.

There are many obstacles to faith, and yet responding with faith and obedience is crucial to responding to God. As the parable explains, just because Jesus is God’s chosen agent does not mean people respond to him automatically. Diversity of response exists, though not because of a variation in his teaching. It is all a matter of the soil, the heart of the hearer.⁴

Jesus related the parable to “a large crowd.” In Luke the mention of a large crowd often meant that a warning about not getting carried away about the response followed (Luke 12:1-2). The parable of the soils is the story about much seed that gets sown, but only a small portion of which bears fruit. The imagery draws on standard Palestinian farming practices. Sowing took place from late October to early December. The sower carried a bag of grain, usually slung over his shoulder. He tossed the seed in rows. It is debated whether the seed was sown and then the land was plowed or vice versa, but it makes no difference to the parable.⁵

We are a culture that is obsessed with results and success. This is part of the reason why the American Church was swept away in the Church growth movement. “Spiritual growth” for many decades in our culture became synonymous with numerical and logistical growth- butts in seats, dollars in the offering, the size and quality of buildings and facilities, the size of church staff, the amount of books a pastor could publish and the kind of conferences a Church could host.

Now just because we do rough ministry in one of the less popular, urban “hoods” of Akron Ohio, which is an obscure city in the United States anyways, doesn’t mean that we need to be pompous about our “lowly” stature either. I’m fully aware that I’m in a position to easily critique the “mainstream” Church, and it’s not my desire to be a loudmouth, contrarian, bully prophet! I want to build the Church up its disciples wherever they may exist in urban, suburban, and rural settings, amongst the poor, the

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middle class, and the rich! I pastor and lead a Church community that either meets during cold months in a youth center situated in a street alley, which used to be an Irish bar, or during warm months outside in a greenspace owned by a punk rock bar right on the street in one of the more infamous neighborhoods in Akron- the Kenmore neighborhood. We regularly minister to kids that roam the streets, the homeless, the addicted, the violent, the forgotten, the mentally ill, the poor, the traumatized, the neglected, and the abused. We don't have a big attractational ministry to the upwardly mobile in the suburbs. We are more like missional recruiters calling people into discipleship and urban ministry work.

But despite all those things I'm aware that plenty of faithful Christ followers exist in, and lead Churches where there are many butts in seats, dollars in the offering, nice facilities, expanded church staff, and led by pastors who publish books and host conferences.

However, there are also plenty of people involved in unhealthy celebrity pastor culture, and consumer Christianity to unbiblical levels.

But Jesus wasn't talking about any of that junk in the parable of the soils. He was really exposing the fact that He, and His Father in Heaven, and by proxy, His true disciples, would and should care about God and people. And the true "success" of a ministry would have more to do with faithfulness of scattering the seed of the Kingdom. And many different "soils" of people's hearts would lead to many different responses to this seed.

With all that, let's dig into the text;

4 As a large crowd was gathering, and people were coming to Jesus from every town, he said in a parable, 5 "A sower went out to sow his seed. As he sowed, some seed fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the sky devoured it. 6 Other seed fell on the rock; when it grew up, it withered away, since it lacked moisture. 7 Other seed fell among thorns; the thorns grew up with it and choked it. 8 Still other seed fell on good ground; when it grew up, it produced fruit: a hundred times what was sown." As he said this, he called out, "Let anyone who has ears to hear listen."

9 Then his disciples asked him, "What does this parable mean?" 10 So he said, "The secrets of the kingdom of God have been given for you to know, but to the rest it is in parables, so that

*Looking they may not see,
and hearing they may not understand.*

11 *“This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. 12 The seed along the path are those who have heard and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. 13 And the seed on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy. Having no root, these believe for a while and fall away in a time of testing. 14 As for the seed that fell among thorns, these are the ones who, when they have heard, go on their way and are choked with worries, riches, and pleasures of life, and produce no mature fruit. 15 But the seed in the good ground—these are the ones who, having heard the word with an honest and good heart, hold on to it and by enduring, produce fruit. (Luke 8:4-15)*

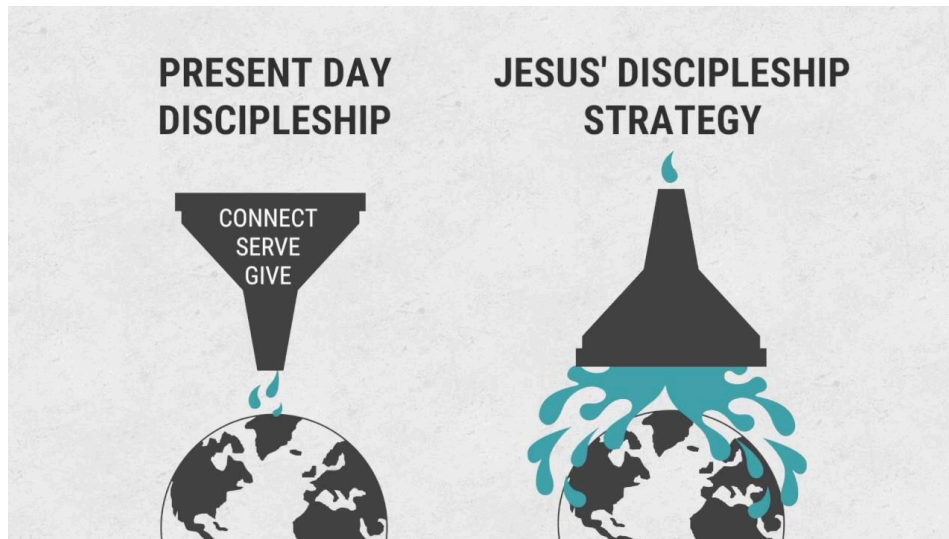
So for one, Jesus spoke in parables to confuse people. People misinterpreted Him constantly, and often had no clue what He was saying.

Wow Jesus, that's a great Church growth strategy! What's with You? *“The secrets of the kingdom of God would only be given to Your genuine disciples to know, but to the rest it would be in parables, so that looking they may not see, and hearing they may not understand?”* Jesus, don't you realize that if you dimmed it down and watered it down a bit more that you'd have more people who could say they were your disciples? Maybe you could build a building, hire a band, come up with a great logo and brand, get a website, and get a really expensive microphone and sound system for them to come and listen to you? What do you think Jesus?

But no Jesus, instead you cited Isaiah 6:9 - 10, in which the prophet spoke judgment on a people who showed signs of being obstinate.⁶ Now that doesn't seem very “Christ-like”, does it? Or... wait a minute... 😊

But all joking aside, Jesus didn't care about how many people He had following Him. He cared about their receptivity. He was looking for those who had ears to hear what He was saying. That's all that ever mattered to Him throughout His ministry. Pete Scazzero made a helpful graphic to depict this dilemma between Jesus's ministry and the ministries we tend to be a part of in the West:

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And I have seen it all first hand. I have been a part of very outwardly successful Churches that drew in big crowds on Sundays because of their programming and event driven mindset, but then struggled to even mobilize a handful of disciples to do anything for the Kingdom. I also, in the rougher context I'm in, despite all the thrust towards discipleship and mission, struggle to mobilize a handful of disciples to do anything for the Kingdom. The work of Jesus is just hard y'all!

35 *Jesus continued going around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. 36* *When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. 37* *Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. 38* *Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest."* (Matt. 9:35-38)

Jesus has His disciples, His workers in the harvest field, on mission to scatter seed, and ultimately to pray that some of this seed would take root in the good soil of willing discipleship to be nurtured and grown into fruit.

Jesus specified four different types of soil on which the seed fell: the road, the rock, thorns and thistles, and good soil. The seed on the road not only had no chance to become embedded in the ground and draw nutrients from the soil, but it was also trampled upon. The rocky soil, at least in Palestine, was hard to spot, since in the hill country, much topsoil was set thinly over a limestone rock base. Weeds were also plentiful, with some able to grow up to six feet in height. The parable also spoke of a hundredfold yield, which was not bad in a culture that expected a seven to tenfold yield (although in Babylon claims of three hundredfold yields were made). All these natural

factors of everyday farming added life to Jesus' imagery. Anyone who worked in the field or walked by them would've known the hazards of sowing seed.⁷

Jesus explained to his disciples that the seed was the Word of God, that is, the revelatory message about the kingdom that went out into the world as Jesus, the sower, tossed the seed. The focus of the parable was on the soils, not the seed, since the seed got four different reactions.⁸ Fruit was never a matter of an overnight exercise. It took nurturing. Thus, Jesus' teaching did not look at the reaction to God's Word in a single moment but over a period of time, which may've been why the planting analogy was used. It takes time to bear fruit, just as it takes time for weeds to choke the seed or for the lack of root in a plant to become evident. Jesus' point deals with how response to the Word is a product of a process. Only one soil meets the goal for which the seed was planted, the fourth soil.⁹

The seed on the road never has a chance, since Satan comes and picks up whatever has not already been trampled. In such cases, people have no chance to hear, believe, and be saved.¹⁰

Some people have unreceptive, or uncultivated soil. This doesn't mean that their spiritual soil is going to stay that way. It just means that they're 100% not ready to receive the gospel or respond to it at the stage, season, and time of life they're in.

When I was 17 years old, I was at the height of my drug addiction. One time someone in my twelfth grade class was trying to share the love of Jesus with me and invite me to his youth group, and I screamed at him and cussed him out. Jesus tried to plant a seed in me through this person and I utterly rejected it immediately.

We see this kind of soil in our Church community all of the time. One time when I was preaching a sermon a few weeks ago, someone yelled out "\$%*& you!", to which I replied (not in the flesh, but the Spirit!) "Peace brother!" Obviously this dude was not ready to accept Jesus but he sure was alright with consuming our free coffee and donuts so praise the Lord! ;)

The seed on the rock starts out well, as a type of short-lived faith that allows germination of the seed. Yet there is no deep root, and when pressures come, these people fall away.¹¹

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Some people have shallow soil. This doesn't mean that their spiritual soil is going to stay that way. It just means that they're not in a deep place of abiding discipleship in Christ at the stage, season, and time of life they're in.

When I was 18 years old, I was newly sober and seeking spiritual things. I had a friend of mine who adamantly shared the gospel with me, befriended me, hung out with me, and even invited me to play bass in his band which played mostly "Jesus music". Initially, I was excited about the message of Jesus because of this friend's influence. However, I had no basis of faith, upbringing or experience in the Church, knowledge of scriptures, a basic understanding of who God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are, or prayer life. As soon as I started to feel life's pressure closing in on me I immediately ran to Buddhism, Astrology, Native American Spirituality, Yoga, weightlifting, coffee, good eating habits, and the redemption of my terrible academic record to try and redeem myself. Jesus tried to plant a seed in me and it germinated, but because of no root and difficulty, didn't take root and spring up. Praise God for this period of my life, because it's when I got sober, and even became celibate, giving up pornography. It's when I got direction. It's when I had a turn around and started to do well in life instead of struggle terribly.

We see this kind of soil- the "rocky soil" in our Church community all of the time. I have seen numerous people have an initial reaction of excitement, and even zeal, for the gospel in our midst, only to walk away entirely from the gospel, the Church, and Jesus within weeks or months after. I think as a culture we're always looking for the thing that "works", and sometimes, because of a lack of understanding and depth of who Jesus is, people look at Jesus like he **broke!** Not broke with money, broke like a bad TV!

Back in the day, when a TV was broke, you'd usually slap it a few times and sometimes it would work. People in the shallow soil on rocky ground try Jesus on for a few, and then things get tough, and they slap Jesus a few times cause they think he **broke**. But don't be slappin Jesus! That's what the people who sentenced Him to death did! Plus- Jesus ain't **broke**. **You** broke. 😏 I promise I'm not trying to dog ya. I'm just saying- Jesus is the sinless, heavenly, perfect Son of God, and you... well... you're... **you!** And I'm **me!** 🙄 You hear me?

The seed among the thorns fights with other things in the ground for nutrients, and the thorns choke them. This describes life's worries, riches, and pleasures, a life wherein spiritual issues are not a priority.¹²

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Some people have a weed root system in their soil. This doesn't mean that their spiritual soil is going to stay that way. It just means that they might even have a lot of information and knowledge about who Jesus is at the stage, season, and time of life they're in, but the things of the world are simply clouding out the possibility of applying all of that stuff. Every time they're on the brink of applying things of the Kingdom, something from the world gets in the way, and much like a weed can choke out a healthy plant, Kingdom fruit is prevented from being produced.

I grew up in a very very rich suburban community called Hudson, Ohio in the Cleveland/Akron area. I had a lot handed to me when I was younger, and I was also a wild and crazy man in my pre-Jesus years. I spent plenty of time in exotic areas of the world on lavish vacations, eating extremely expensive bougie meals, and smoking crazy expensive cigars. In my pre-Jesus days I was drinking top shelf liquor, and doing expensive amounts and types of drugs. I had cash and money constantly at my fingertips, I got my first cars, college and apartments paid for in full, and more. I was sexually active outside of marriage from the ages of 15 to 18. I was addicted to pornography from age 12 to 18 (with a brief relapse at the age of 20). I know what it's like to have the pleasures of life just thrown into my lap. And I'll tell you- it left me empty and depressed plenty of times. By the time I got into my own zone of adulting, following Jesus, and raising a family, I found more joy in the things of God than in all the material things of the world.

We see this kind of soil in our Church community all of the time. We especially see it in American Christianity. We've got a plethora of "Rich Young Rulers" out there (Matt. 19:16-30). We've got a bunch of people who do a lot of Christian "things", and yet bear no fruit. They might come to Church, read the Bible, be in a discipleship group, tithe, give generously to causes, and send their kids to Christian school. But they have far more of a desire to enjoy the pleasures of the world than to follow Jesus, and that destroys the possibility of them bearing fruit. They *like* Jesus, and like plenty of what He and the Word of God **says**, but wouldn't give up their (FILL IN THE BLANK) for Jesus, and therefore end up cherry picking the things out of Christianity that suit their consumer and individual needs, while discarding the rest.

I would venture to say that the Lord is pruning the Church right now in America. He's tired of people giving lip service to Jesus and bearing absolutely zero Kingdom fruit for Him.

I could stand up here right now and tell you that I'm a huge fan of Drake and his music. But if you asked me to name one of his songs, I couldn't even name one. If you asked

me to give you facts about his life, I couldn't name any. If you asked me if I had been to any of his live shows, I'd tell you no.

And people shouldn't act like they're followers of Jesus when they don't really love Him or put Him absolutely first in their lives. That's the only place Jesus belongs in your life—in first place, not second, not third. (Ex. 20:3)

The successful seed is that which finds good soil. This grain lands on a good and true heart, which hears the message, retains it, and has the patience to hold fast to it.¹³

I have been exposed to people doing some pretty extraordinary things for Jesus. Doing world missions, urban youth ministry, ministry in prisons, and incredible work amongst the poorest of the poor and the most dangerous of the dangerous. They're not perfect. They sin. They make mistakes. They let people down. They have struggles. But Jesus is fully alive in them and those around them are impacted by Christ through them. It's evident!

I have also met so many faithful Christ followers that evidently have Him living in them. They simply serve people well, love people well, live with the honesty of Christ ruling their lives, are so stinking generous, are so fun, so life giving, so selfless, and more. They have the Holy Spirit running the show in their lives. They're not perfect. They sin. They make mistakes. They let people down. They have struggles. But Jesus is fully alive in them and those around them are impacted by Christ through them. It's evident!

We see this kind of soil in our Church community all of the time. We have some incredible Christ followers in our midst. We have people serving the poor, serving the marginalized, being amazing business people and lights in the companies they work for, discipling others, making great music, making great art, dancing beautifully, being wildly generous, being amazing spouses, sons and daughters, making a powerful impact in their communities, teaching, preaching, evangelizing, shepherding, and more. We celebrate you imperfect disciples of Jesus that make Streetlight Community Church a wonderful group of people to do life with!

And if you're in crappy soil, move over! Your soil doesn't have to stay crappy and if it does, it's partially your fault! Maybe you got born into some crappy soil, I get it. Maybe you got born into some soil that had crappy elements. I get it. But for God's sakes get a soil makeover! Let Jesus into your soil! Let Him jackhammer the concrete over your heart and clear it out of the way! Let Him rototill the rocks and clay, removing them, and replacing them with His lovely potting soil! Let Him weed the weeds outta your life so

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that you find your main pleasure in Him and stop getting the possibility of Kingdom fruit choked outta yo garden!

Many people have asked which soil in this parable represents “saved” people? Clearly those represented by the first soil are not saved, while the fourth are clearly among the redeemed. The debate stems from the second and third soils, especially since Luke notes that those pictured by the second soil have faith, at least for a time. The difficulty comes in their being said to “fall away” (v. 13) and in the recognition that only one soil actually bears fruit. One can thoroughly contend that the parable is deliberately ambiguous here.

We must, however, make one additional observation. The situation of the second and third soils is seen as tragic, since the goal of sowing has not been reached. There is no comfort for those who are described as these soils. Rather, their situation is lamentable. This point is important, because one of the effects of stating confidently that the second and third soils are saved is that it offers comfort for those who fall into those descriptions. The parable in literary terms offers no such comfort. To “fall away” in the context of the parable is to fall away from God’s Word and to reach the point where faith is no longer present. Faith that appears a short time is not faith, since other New Testament texts suggest that genuine faith never lets go of Jesus, because it’s aware He’ll never let them go! (John 15:1 - 6; Col. 1:21 - 23; 2 John 9) Though the text’s portrait is not explicit on this question since it is treating another issue, the literary thrust of the image of the second soil questions its healthy status. The same can be said for the third, where faith is not mentioned.¹⁴

Didn’t Jesus put it point blank when He said;

1 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. **2** Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes, and he prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit. **3** You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. **4** Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. **5** I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me. **6** If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. **7** If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you. **8** My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples. (John 15:1-8)

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One can easily surmise that no **fruit** equals no **relationship with Jesus**. One can fool themselves into believing they know and follow Jesus. But my question for you today is simply this- do you really know Him? Or are you just pretending that you do? Or maybe you want nothing to do with Him and you won't hear me. But if you claim to know Him, I want you to hand your life totally over to Him and ask Him to do whatever He wants. That's what's required of us as His disciples.

And isn't He worth it? Isn't He incredible? Isn't He better than anything of this earth? Isn't His love better than sex, drugs, rock n' roll, money, pleasure, adventure, power, control, popularity, and prestige anyways? What are you waiting for? He lived a perfectly obedient life for you in the eyes of God, willingly gave up His life to die for all your sins, past, present and future, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven to sit at God's right hand so that you would be free from the fleeting, disappointing, numbing things of this world! Give your all to Him! Now!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS :

1. What are your thoughts about giving money to the Church?
What positive and negative experiences have you had with the Church in relation to money?
2. What does it mean to have "good soil"?
3. Who makes our soil good? Jesus? Ourselves?