

The Soil of Awakening
Message Notes, May 14, 2017
Hosea 10:12, Matthew 13:3-9

God is still calling us to awakening – to a new surrender to His Spirit, to a deeper yearning for His fullness, to a fresh vision for His kingdom to “come” among us and through us. We have had several expressions and images of this awakening: wind, fire, a river, the unclogging of a spring, the filling of the “middle room” (i.e., soul). Today we focus on a new image – the contrast between fallow ground and plowed ground.

Keith quoted from the writing of A.W. Tozer, a chapter titled: “Miracles Follow the Plow.” Excerpts:

There are two kinds of ground: Fallow ground and ground that has been broken up by the plow.

The fallow ground is smug, contented, protected from the shock of the plow and the agitation of the harrow. Safe and undisturbed, it sprawls lazily in the sunshine, the picture of sleepy contentment. But it is paying a terrible price for its tranquility: Never does it see the miracle of growth ... nor see the wonders of bursting seed. ... Fruit it can never know because it is afraid of the plow and the harrow.

In direct opposition to this, the cultivated field has yielded itself to the adventure of living. The protecting fence has opened to admit the plow. Peace has been shattered by the shouting farmer and the rattle of machinery. The field has felt the travail of change; it has been upset, turned over, bruised and broken, but ... the seed shoots up its miracle of life. All over the field the hand of God is at work in the ... ever renewed service of creation. ... Nature’s wonders follow the plow.

There are two kinds of lives also: The fallow and the plowed.

The man of fallow life is contented with himself and the fruit he once bore. He does not want to be disturbed. ... The spirit of adventure is dead within him. ... To be has taken the place of to become. He has fenced himself in, and by the same act, he has fenced out God and the miracle.

The plowed life has, in repentance, thrown open the protecting fences and sent the plow of confession into the soul. ... Such a life has put away defense, and has forsaken the safety of death to the peril of life. Discontent, yearning, contrition, courageous obedience to the will of God: these have bruised and broken the soil till it is ready again for the seed. ... Fruit follows the plow ... as God “rains down righteousness.”

What a powerful analogy of the spirit-filled life!

- Which ground depicts the state of your “field”?
- Which of Tozer’s descriptive words above are most poignant for you?
- How do you interpret Tozer’s phrase: “The plowed life . . . has forsaken the safety of death to the peril of life”?

There is a tension here: Only God can produce His life and fruit in us; it comes by grace and not by works, but we must participate in His grace.

Hosea 10:12 expresses this same image of plowed ground. Here we see both aspects: “Break up your unplowed ground” (our participation); “The Lord will shower righteousness on you” (God’s work of grace).

How do we “break up our unplowed ground”?

1. **Repentance.** The whole book of Hosea is a call to turn away from sin and back to God.
2. **Seek after Him.** “For it is time to seek after Him” (Hosea 10:12). Yearning, asking, seeking.
 - In farming, if you want a crop of weeds, you simply do nothing at all and you will get such a crop (useless, no value, a nuisance at best, wreaking havoc at worst).

- A healthy, robust crop takes time, attention, and effort. The soil must be well-prepared, then the sun and rain and nutrients produce a fruitful crop of great value.
- If we want a fruitful life, full of God, we must “seek after Him with our whole heart” (Jer. 29:11-13).

Other scriptures that call and invite us to pursue God and the life He longs to give:

- Matthew 7:7 – The Greek verb here is a continual tense: “Keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking.”
- Philippians 3:12-14 – Paul talks about “pressing on ... forgetting what lies behind and straining forward.” Not really about works and performance, but about yearning, pursuing, and surrendering
- Philippians 4:12-13 – Paul talks about the secret of being content in/through “the One who gives me strength.”
- In Philippians 3 – in regards to the things and life of God, I yearn, seek, strain, press on.
- In Philippians 4 – in regards to the things of this world, I am content “whatever my circumstances.”

If we are spiritually fallow, we get this backwards! We yearn and strain after things of the world and are passively content about the things of God.

God sows and cultivates His abundant life in seekers, askers, knockers, and pressers!

3. **The Spiritual Disciplines** (prayer, scripture, community, worship, fasting, generosity, solitude, etc.) that God has given to us, to help us connect with Him and abide in Him.

One other passage that develops this “ground” analogy is Matthew 13:3-9. The seed of the gospel or the life of God is sown in 4 different soils: Hard Path Soil, Rocky Soil, Thorny Soil, and Good Soil.

1. **Hard Path:** The unexamined or spiritually unattentive life.
2. **Rocky Soil:** Unaddressed brokenness in us that keeps the life of God from taking root and growing: Unconfessed sin, unhealed hurts, unforgiveness hardened into bitterness, unacknowledged family baggage/dysfunction, deceptive untruths that have become ungodly beliefs. God wants to heal and free us from such “rocks” of brokenness so His life can take root and flourish in us.
3. **Thorny Soil:** “The worries of this world and the deceptiveness of riches” (as Jesus states plainly in Matt. 13:22).

Also, as Keith pointed out, there is simply **garbage** – these are things similar to the “rocks,” but they are perhaps not buried as deeply in us, but rather shallowly “piled” on top, things we just give into out of passivity or neglect: worldly pursuits, fleshly lusts, allowing others to “dump” on us, etc.

Jesus tells us (in John 15) that his Father is the Gardener, and we are His vineyard. A vineyard is precious to a gardener; it is his passion and life. In like manner, we are precious to God. He treasures us, loves us, and wants us to flourish in His love and life. This call to open our lives to His plowing is a loving call, an invitation to life and fullness, not a reprimand or punishment.

Revisit Hosea 10:12 – “reap the fruit of [His] unfailing love.”

Will you trust your loving Gardener? Will you accept His invitation? Will you surrender to His caring plowing? Will you ask Him to sow and grow in you the life and fruit of His Spirit? Will you be fallow or fertile soil? Plowing makes the difference.