



TIME OF GRACE®

## *Jesus' Growth Plan for Me: What Are the Threats to My Faith*

### Study Notes

#### *Summary*

God's Word doesn't always seem to work in our lives. We share it, read it, and hear it, but it doesn't seem to change us spiritually. That's because the Word of God, Jesus said, is like a seed—it's packed with potential, but it is also small and vulnerable. How vulnerable? Pastor Mike identifies these everyday threats to God's Word that can stop us from growing in our faith.

- Luke 8:4-8 <sup>4</sup> While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: <sup>5</sup> "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. <sup>6</sup> Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown." When he said this, he called out, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."
- Luke 8:11-12 — <sup>11</sup> "This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. <sup>12</sup> Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.

❖ Threat #1 — \_\_\_\_\_.

- Luke 8:13 — <sup>13</sup> Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.

❖ Threat #2 — \_\_\_\_\_.

- Luke 8:14 — <sup>14</sup> The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.

❖ Threat #3-5 — \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.

- Luke 8:15 — <sup>15</sup> But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.
  
- Applications:
  - What \_\_\_\_\_ of soils am I?
  - Being fruitful is a \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Thank God for \_\_\_\_\_.
  
- Luke 8:8 — <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.” When he said this, he called out, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

## *Points to Ponder*

1. Evaluate: Every moment the Bible is open is packed with potential.
2. Discuss the four issues from today’s message with a Christian friend. Which of them have stunted your spiritual growth the most in the past year?
3. Study 1 Corinthians 3:5-9. List three important truths about how our spiritual growth happens.

## *Homework for Next Week*

Read Matthew 13:31-33

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Jesus' Growth Plan for Me: What Are the Threats to My Faith?**  
Luke 8:4-8; Luke 8:11-15  
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In my opinion, one of the most exciting things that Jesus ever said was that God's word is like a seed. Now, I don't know a ton about gardening, but here's the little bit that I do know. A seed is one of the smallest things that you come in contact with, and yet, overtime, what happens? It gets almost unbelievably big. Like, if you're an alien from another planet that had never seen seeds turn into trees, and you could watch a time lapse, would you even believe it was true? Like, "That dinky little thing turned into that?" And Jesus said, when you come in contact with the word of his Father, when you come to church and this book is open, when you go home, sit the kids on your lap or just open your Bible app, when you come into contact with the word of God, that word is like a seed. To put it another way, according to Jesus, the biggest spiritual things in your entire life will start so small, you might believe nothing big could come from it, but according to the son of God himself, God's word is like a seed.

But you knew there was going to be a 'but', right? You know the problem with seeds? They're small, so small that your average bird can land in the garden and snatch it up; a couple of hot weeks in the middle of summer can wither it; a bunch of weeds in an untended garden can choke it out before it produces fruits. Seeds are packed with potential, but the seed, in so many ways, is vulnerable, and if you don't protect it from the threats all around it, it doesn't grow into a big tree, and it doesn't produce a dozen tomatoes. Sometimes the seed does nothing, and that's actually what Jesus wants to warn us about today.

Today, we're going to study a really famous story that Jesus told called the Parable of the Sower, and in this story, Jesus is going to tell us about the immense potential of the Word of God. He can bring back a hundred times more than you would expect, but he's going to spend most of his time warning us about the things that threaten the Word of God because you know this is true, right? You've seen it in other people for sure, maybe even in yourself. Sometimes people go to church, and nothing happens. Sometimes people say their prayers before bed, and nothing changes. Sometimes, every Sunday kind of people aren't the most joyful, and loving, and self-controlled. Jesus wants to tell us today that God's word is immensely powerful, but it is not guaranteed.

And so, today is going to give us a crash course on how to protect moments like this where God sows his word into our heart in hopes that it can bless us in really big ways. So, if you have your Bible with you, I'm going to be in Luke 8 today, the Parable of the Sower, and here's how it starts: "While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: 'A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground,

and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. But still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.' When he had said this, Jesus called out, 'Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.'" Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts so that they may not believe and be saved. You catch that really important detail? Jesus says, "These are the people who hear."

This story is not about the people who skip church, but the ones who go to it. These aren't for the people who skip pass Time of Grace on their television sets to get to the game. They're the ones who pause long enough to watch it. These aren't people who are so busy that they never get to their Bible. These are people who hear the word of God. Essentially, this is you and this is me, but notice the sad thing that happens. The devil swoops in, and before the seed grows roots or produces fruit, he snatches it up and nothing happens. No faith, no salvation, no blessing. But before you blame the devil, Jesus wants to tell you the real enemy. If you're taking notes in your program, actually write this down. The first threat that Jesus is describing is pride.

Read the rest of Luke 8 or the other versions of this story in Matthew 13 or Mark 4, and you'll understand that the people who don't get anything out of the word is because they don't want to. They might be there to hear it, but their heart's not ready to hear it. It's like, do you remember when you were a teenager and your mom or dad wanted to sit you down and give you a lecture that you had no interest in? Did you hear their lecture? Well, technically, but did you have ears to hear it? No, you're just trying to get it over with, right? Jesus said, sometimes people come in contact with the Word of God, and they physically hear it, but their hearts aren't humble enough to receive it. It's what the Bible calls 'a hard heart', and like a path that has no chance of being the soil that the seed needs, nothing happens, and the devil swoops into proud hearts, and he feasts.

So, here's the hard question. Is there anything that you really don't want to hear when you're here? Like, is there any topic, that even if it's in the Bible, and even if I'm not giving my opinion, or some church tradition, if it's just reading the scripture, is there anything that you would prefer to skip? If we ran some sermon series, let's say it's on money, on marriage, on the government, on how to treat your enemies, on how -- you know, is there anything where your heart would kind of say, "Nah, I don't want to hear that." According to Jesus, if that's your heart, you might be the reason the devil isn't on a diet. And you can deceive yourself into hearing the word without having the humility to receive it. The first threat, according to Jesus, is pride.

But not everyone is like that. Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing, they fall away. Like, if you grew up with generic religion, or just be good, or try harder, and you come to an actual Christian church and hear the gospel, and you say, "Wait, okay. There's a God and he likes me? He's not just in heaven with an angel, counting all the stuff I messed up, he is for me? He didn't set up a big ladder so I could crawl with my moral behavior, he sent his Son down so I could be perfect in his sight? Uh yeah, I like that. Wait, this God, who has all the power in the world, he runs the universe, he knows the future, and he listens when I pray in Jesus' name? Uh, yeah, more of that. And he's even going to twist everything that the devil meant from evil and he's going to turn it for my good? He's going to forgive me today,

tomorrow, and for the rest of my life? He's going to send angels to protect? Are you kidding me? This is true?"

And we say, "Yes." And people say, "Amen," until, what Jesus calls the 'time of testing'. He's talking about the time when you receive God's word of joy while you're here, but it's not so joyful out there. It's when you bring your enthusiasm for the Word of God back to your boyfriend, your father, your neighbor, and they're not impressed. In fact, they might think less of you. They might not agree with that teaching, those scriptural principles, what God has to say about this or that, and instead of celebrating with you, they think much less of you. That time of testing, Jesus said, can wither people who have shallow faith. And they might say, "Amen." with joy while it's here, but they might give up that joy rather quickly. Write this down, it's the second threat to great faith; it's not pride, it's pain.

But some of you aren't like that either. I jump to verse 14, he says, "The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature." A couple years ago, my wife, Kim, was planting a garden in the backyard, and I wanted to be a helpful husband, so I asked, "How can I help?" And she handed me a hoe and a packet of seeds, and she says, "Plant these." To which I said, "How do you do that?" To which she said, "Read the back of the package." To which I said, "Oh." Have you ever read the back of a seed package before? It actually tells you exactly what to do, it tells us exactly how deep the trench should be, it says exactly how many weeks or months you should expect from seed, to germination, to fruit. And, here's my point. It will tell you exactly how far apart to space the seeds. I have to say, I had never thought of that before. Like, you want more fruit? Throw more seeds in there, but if you think about it, it doesn't work that way, and you can figure out why, right? There's only so much space, so much soil, so many nutrients, so much sun to receive, so much moisture as the rain falls from the sky. It turns out, for seeds to mature, note that word, they need space, and according to Jesus, your faith and God's word is exactly the same. You might not lose your faith or give up on Jesus, but you will never mature into the kind of person that God wants you to be unless the Word has space. You know, you might squeeze it in, you know, a little a bit of time on a Sunday to hear it, but honestly, for it to grow on you, it needs time, it needs space.

A simple example to make my point. As a husband, I can come to church and hear the passage read from Ephesians 5, "Husbands, love your wives." Check. But every husband and every wife here knows that that's not where the story ends, right? Honey, I do love you. I heard a sermon about it. No, I'm going to need some time, right? To think about that, okay. What would that look like to love Kim this week? What makes her feel loved? What could I do more of? What could I do less of? And I'm going to need time to do it. And if my schedule is so jam-packed with things, maybe they're not even bad things, but there are things that there's no space in my schedule for that word to grow, then I can't put it into practice, and I can't mature into the fruitful Christian that God wants me to be. That's what Jesus is saying here.

Apparently, this is so important, he actually lists three separate threats in this one part of the story. Write these down too. Jesus warns us about worries, about wealth, and finally, about wants or pleasures. When Jesus warns us about worries, he's speaking to people who have the hardest

time saying no to busyness, and it's already crazy, I'm already flying around, but if I would say, "No." If I would step back, who would help if I didn't? What would they think if I didn't? And when Christians spend all of our time worrying what would happen if we didn't, we often rush through life without the ability to breathe, to think, to enjoy, and to obey the word of God. For some of you, that is the seed that I hope God uses to give you courage to say, "Hey, I'm sorry, but I have to step back. I would love to, but it's just a busy season. The kids are at that age, and I can't act like I'm single, without kids anymore. I love you." Don't let worry hold your heart captive. God wants more for you than that.

Let's talk about wealth. You know what money never tells you upfront? That it will make you busy. In another version of the parable, Jesus actually calls this 'the deceitfulness of wealth'. It's not that money is wrong, it's just that we often forget, the more money, normally, the more busy. It's super obvious when you think about working at an hourly job, right? If I'm going to get more money, I have to put in more hours, but what people often don't think about is when your company offers you a promotion, they're not just offering you more money for free, it's going to make you busy. If you've ever been a manager over people, you know the busyness of the schedule, and the changes, and "I can't make it," the decisions. You know the emails that you bring home, it's like, you're home, you're not working, but you're still working. It's when you have to fill in, and the higher up you go, the busier things get.

Or how about the last one? Wants. Yeah, there's a whole bunch of stuff that I want, I want to watch a soccer game today, I want to check my phone and see how my friends are doing on social media. I want to binge on Netflix for a little while. Like, I know that stuff isn't wrong, but have you ever realized, if you don't keep track of how much time you spend on your wants, they end up bigger than you think. And if you remember when the iPhone, a couple years ago, decided to track your screen time? Then if you're like me, cringe when they send you the report, like, "No. Nooo. Did someone grab my phone when I wasn't using it? Like, there's no way I scrolled that long." It's crazy, how when they release the data on how much the average American watches TV, or scrolls on Facebook, or watches sports, you know? You've become a baseball fan, you watch half the games, three hours, like, our wants and our pleasures just grow to such big proportions that we just -- we sometimes don't have time to do the simple things that would honor God. Because if you and I can overcome these three threats, we might end up as the final verse in Jesus' story.

Jesus says in verse 15: "But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering, produce a crop." So, if you're taking notes, write this down. When I was in college, I had a stunningly good Bible professor who taught us this parable. And I remember at the end of his teaching, he said, "There's a question that every Christian should ask themselves when they read this," and here's the question. The question is, "What combination of soils am I?" I thought that was brilliant. Yeah, as you were listening to me today, and listening to the words of Jesus, did you ever think, like, "I think I'm that one, but I don't know, I'm kind of that one. And yeah, sometimes I do that, but sometimes I do that too." And my professor would say, "Exactly." He said, "The right question to ask is what combination am I today?" Like, what percentage of God's words am I kind of reluctant to hear? How often do I kind of bail on truth because my loved ones didn't like it? Or am I too busy? Why am I chasing

money? Why are my priorities backwards? He said, "Ask yourself, 'What combination of soils am I?' And this is huge, "What combination was I a year ago? Have I seen growth by the grace of God?" When I look back, you know, I'm not perfect yet, but when I look back at a year, do I say, "You know what? God is changing me. Or maybe I'm kind of slipping in this one area." That's a great question, that's my super bonus point homework for you. If you could sit down, just for 15 minutes with a friend or loved one, just meditate on the question. "Where am I right now and where was I? And with what kind of tweaks could God change me for the better?"

Application number two, "Being fruitful is a miracle." I bet there was, maybe, four to nine times during this message where you felt kind of bad about yourself. Is that true? I know I do, but this struck me, the fact that anything good is happening in my heart is a miracle. You ever thought about the seed? You're ready to put this tiny little vulnerable seed into the ground, you said, "There are a thousand things that can stop this from doing anything. It takes one fat, hungry bird and this is gone. It takes one bad season in the summer and this is withered up. It takes one hungry rabbit -- Do you hate rabbits as much as I do? Just one hungry rabbit, it takes one bug, it takes one bad storm. Like, if you pluck a tomato out of your garden, you should gasp. There are a thousand things could have gone wrong. It only would have taken one. It's a miracle, and the same thing is true for you. If God is producing any fruit in your heart, that is an honest to goodness miracle. If you could have gone off on someone this week but you took a deep breath and didn't, that's a miracle. If you grieved the loss of someone you loved, but you did it with hope because you knew that God wasn't lying to you, that peace is a miracle. If you prioritized the Bible, or prayer, or church when you could have been rushing to your phone, to sports, to shows, to news, but you made space for that, that's a miracle. The devil was flying around the world, surrounding you, your own sinful nature was within you, but by the grace of God, it didn't happen. And so, yes, we take our faults seriously. It's true, we are not where we want to be, but by the grace of God, we are what we are. And today, we celebrate God's kindness in doing anything good within us.

Finally, and most importantly, write this down. Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, God, for Jesus. Now let me be honest with you here. This is not actually the point of the story that Jesus told. I'm kind of importing it from the Bible, but when I read this story, I'm so grateful for Jesus. Here's why. Because God's Son was good soil, right? My pride can get in the way of the word, I really like to be liked, so the pain sometimes makes me shrink back. I'm easily distractible by another season of *The Office* or a good soccer game on TV. But today, you and I don't have to look in a mirror and regret the things we've messed up. We can look at the cross and be grateful that Jesus never did. Tell me this, was Jesus Christ ever proud? No. Did he ever bail on his heavenly Father's word because of the pain of those around him? No. Was he worried about what people would think? Nope. Was he busy chasing money? Never. Did he ever prioritize his own pleasure above the plans of God? Not a single time. And because Jesus' heart was perfect soil, when he died on the cross, God made us good, right?

This is what I love about the Christian faith, these big blessings, so big they're almost unbelievable, that God forgives us, and he cleanses us, and he loves us, and he likes us, his face is shining upon us, like, my eternity is going to be so good, I can't even imagine it. When God thinks about you, you bring a smile to his face, and you'd say, "How can those big things be



true?" And my answer would be, "Because big things start small." One guy, one cross, one day, one weekend, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was like a seed, and it has grown and produced big blessings, my salvation and yours, my future and yours, our connection to God. Thank you, heavenly Father, for your Son. Let's pray.

Dear Jesus, thank you for taking the pressure off. Our eternity, our salvation, our connection to our Heavenly Father is not based on our behavior, but yours. I know you give us this amazing offer and so we pray boldly that you would send your Holy Spirit, that we would just not hear this word, but we would hold onto it, that we would retain it and persevere through all the things that happened in our life, so that maybe, not today, maybe not tomorrow, maybe not in 58 days, but in the future, your word will not come back empty. It will produce blessings so big we wouldn't believe it if you would tell us in this moment.

God, I've seen you do this a hundred times. Someone just thinks they're coming to church and checking things out, and it's one Sunday that changes them forever. They think they're just checking a box and signing up for a class, but it's one group that changes them forever. Someone makes the choice to start the day, not with their phone, but with your word, and those tiny little 15 minutes grow into something that blesses generations and changes family trees. God, we want that, and you want that, that's why you've given us your Word. So Heavenly Father, do more than we ask, more than we expect, and more than we imagine for our good, but for your glory. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.