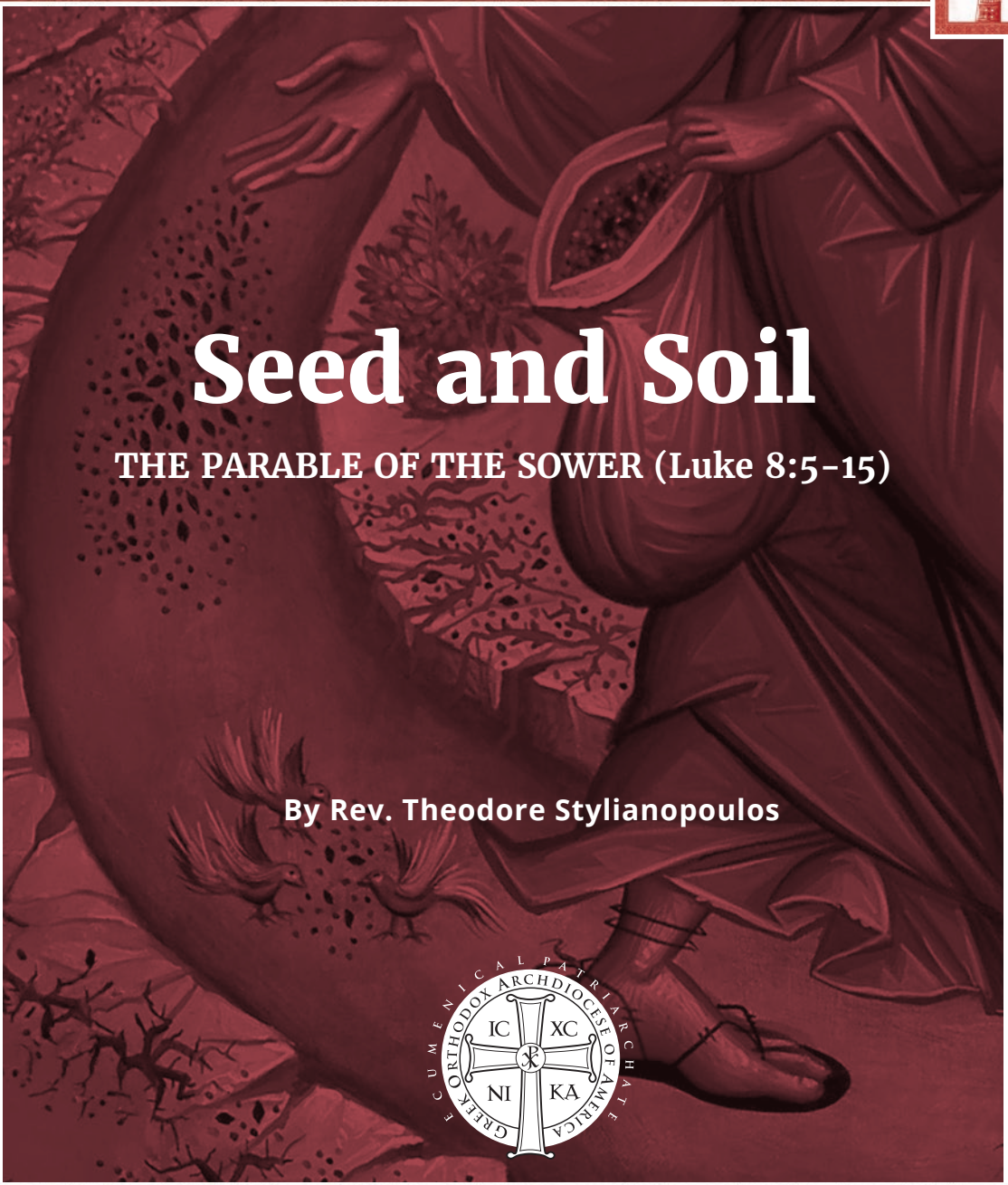


Seed and Soil

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER (Luke 8:5–15)

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Orthodox Christianity **Faith & Life** Series



"And some fell into good soil and grew, and yielded a hundredfold" (Luke 8:8)

A seed contains a miracle. When you look at it from the outside, or touch it, it appears hard, dry, perhaps even dead and incapable of producing anything. But place it in the ground, give it water and warmth, and life begins to stir. The outer shell dies but the inner kernel comes alive by the mysterious forces of growth. The inner powers of the kernel are released when the seed is in proper soil and receives adequate moisture. The kernel germinates and new life begins. As long as nourishment is provided, growth continues. From the seed comes a flower, a plant, or a tree, each of which was present only potentially in the seed.

Is the miracle of growth manifest in human beings, too? Yes, by all means. Not only our physical being but also our spiritual being has the potential of miraculous growth. Physical growth is practically spontaneous and automatic. Yet physical growth requires adequate nourishment and a suitable environment. Spiritual growth is neither spontaneous nor automatic. Spiritual growth requires the exercise of personal freedom through intellectual choices, moral and spiritual decisions, commitments and actions. But spiritual growth, too, surely needs a proper environment and constant nourishment to flourish.

In the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:5–15), Jesus teaches that both seed and soil are necessary for growth. Both seed and soil need proper interaction to produce a satisfying crop. The seed is likened to the word of God. The soil is the life and heart of each human being. The parable tells us that much seed is lost when falling into unreceptive soil. However, when seed and soil connect and interact properly, astonishing growth occurs. *"And some fell into good soil and grew, and yielded a hundredfold."*

What do we mean by the seed of the word of God? What is God's "word?" Any human word, spoken or written, conveys meaning. Many words together express a message, various forms of communication from one person to another. Words and messages reflect the mind and character of the one from whom they come.

In a similar way, God's word is God's utterance, God's speech, God's message. God's words convey precious knowledge that God wants human beings to know and live by. *"I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods before me"* (Exodus 20:2–3). *"Seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"* (Matthew 6:33). *"Love one another as I have loved you"* (John 13:34). *"Whoever would be great among you must be your servant; ... for the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many"* (Matthew 20:26–28). All those divine words are not merely abstract principles, arbitrarily established just to test human obedience and keep people in their place. Rather, they make up essential instruction that is intrinsic to human nature. They are food and drink natural to our humanity as personal and moral beings created in the image and likeness of God. When those divine words are wholeheartedly embraced and faithfully practiced, they

become "life-bearing" and "life-giving." They generate light and life because they guide to right and harmonious relationships between God and people, between people and people, as well as between people and creation. They are like seeds which, when falling into good soil, grow and yield a hundredfold.

Do you recall some biblical verses about the importance of God's word? When Jesus was hungry, He was tempted to turn stones into bread. But He rejected the temptation and said: *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"* (Mt 4:4). Upon finishing the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared, *"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock"* (Mt 7:24-25). At a time of crisis, Jesus asked His disciples: *"Do you also wish to go away?"* Simon Peter replied: *"Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life"* (Jn 6:67-68).

Moreover, God's word is not only instruction and guidance. God's word discloses God's character and power. God's word both announces and enacts who God is, what He has done, and what He is doing even now. God cannot be separated from His word. God's word is always the vehicle of God's holy presence and creative power. In Genesis we read that God said: *"'Let there be light!' And there was light."* In the Old Testament, the prophet Jeremiah (23:29) likened God's word to a powerful hammer that strikes and breaks rock, that is, the hardness of human hearts and the hardness of human communities, in judgment and for healing. The Book of Hebrews (4:12) declares: *"The word of God is living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing to soul and spirit ... and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."*

Even more astonishing is that Christ himself, according to the New Testament, is the Word of God—Logos Theou—the supreme self-revelation of who God is, what He has done, and what He continues to do today. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... In Him was light and the light was the life of all people. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it"* (John 1:1-5).

Of course those words point to the core message of the Christian faith, the good news of the gospel. The good news is that God in Christ has broken humanity's bondage to the powers of sin, evil, and death. God in Christ actualizes His love and forgiveness for sinners. God in Christ offers to every man and woman a new start, a new order of life, a life of grace and truth. Because of the divine nature and blessings of the gospel, St. Paul variously calls the gospel itself the word of God, the word of Christ, the word of grace, the word of reconciliation, the word of truth. When the gospel of Christ is wholeheartedly announced, the announcement does not merely inform but also mediates Christ and His blessings.

Christ in His holiness and power is present in His word. When the good news is heard and embraced, human hearts are stirred and human lives change. The gospel *"is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes"* (Rom 1:16). When falling into good soil, the gospel takes root and grows and yields a hundredfold.

Nevertheless, if the soil is not conducive to growth, the seed of the word of God remains inactive and powerless. Seeds cannot take root on the hard path. Seeds cannot last in rocky ground lacking adequate moisture. Seeds cannot flourish among weeds. Jesus tells us (Lk 8:11–15) that the hard path is a faithless heart, a heart that hears but pays no true heed to God's word. The rocky ground is a heart that initially receives God's word but later loses endurance when trials and temptation come. The soil with weeds is a heart filled with worldly cares and distractions that seem to swallow up God's word. Lack of faith, lack of endurance, and lack of spiritual focus—those indeed are the negative elements of the infertile soil that cancel out the miracle of the seed. We know all about these elements because we face them every day. We need to be humbly mindful that all of us at various times have exemplified the hard path, the rocky ground, or the soil with weeds.

What we need much more is to concentrate on building up good soil. Christ the Sower is forever faithful, enduring, and active through his mighty and life-giving word. What men and women need to do is respond in kind; to offer to Him the soil of *"an honest and good heart"* (Luke 8:15). The parable clearly identifies the negative elements of the unproductive soil—lack of faith, lack of endurance, lack of spiritual focus. But the parable also powerfully suggests the opposite elements, the contrasting positive qualities of the honest and good heart. Those are lively faith, patient endurance, and the focus of an active Christian worldview. The Lord warned: *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear"* (Luke 8:8). But the Lord also gives assurance that, when falling on good soil, the seed of God's word takes deep root, grows bountifully and yields blessings beyond imagination. Praise, thanksgiving, and glory be to Christ the eternal Sower. Amen. ✠

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