

Some Seed.?!

by Dr. J. Vernon McGee

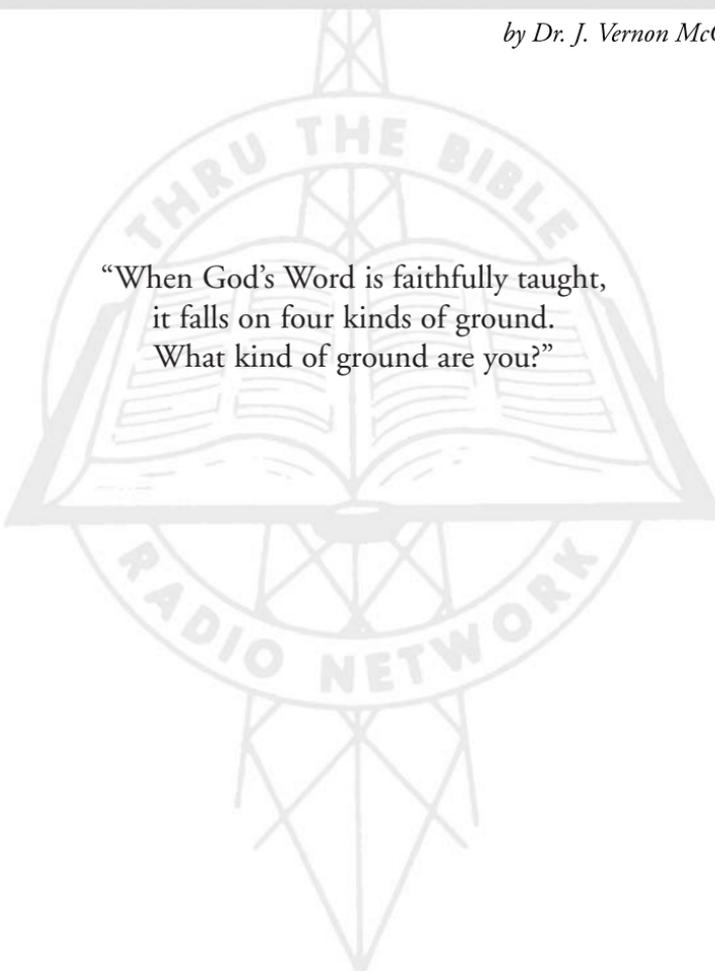


**Thru the Bible
Radio Network**

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Some Seed.?!

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“When God’s Word is faithfully taught,
it falls on four kinds of ground.
What kind of ground are you?”

All Scripture references are from the
New Scofield Reference Bible.
Printed in the United States of America
1997, Revised 2006

The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the seaside. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a boat, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And he spoke many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some of the seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprang up, because they had no deepness of earth. And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up, and choked them. But other seeds fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear....Hear, therefore, the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way-side. But he that received the seed in stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and immediately with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself; but endureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, immediately he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this age, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed in the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it, who also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

(Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23)

Some Seed.?!

The punctuation following the title may look strange to you, but it tells the story of this parable. In fact, it divides the parable into three points, which we will consider. First, SOME SEED. This is merely a statement – the parable is about some seed. Secondly, we have SOME SEED? There is a question about what the seed will produce because of the variableness of the soil. What will happen to the seed that is sown? Thirdly, SOME SEED! The exclamation point indicates the tremendous power in the seed – what it will do when it falls on good soil.

The Gospel of Matthew is very important. It is the open door to the Bible. If you are to understand the Bible, the Gospel of Matthew is the entrance that leads to it. It is not only a door, it is a swinging door. It swings back into the Old Testament, gathering up more prophecies than does any of the other Gospel records, and then it swings on into the New Testament farther than any other Gospel, for it is Matthew alone that mentions the church.

The thirteenth chapter of Matthew is the hinge on which the door swings. In this chapter are several parables. The parable of the sower, with its interpretation, is the first parable and one of two that the Lord Jesus Christ interpreted. Therefore this parable is the key to the thirteenth chapter. And if it is the key to the thirteenth chapter which is the hinge, and the door is the Gospel of Matthew, you can see that the parable of the sower is the key to the understanding of the Bible! That is how important it really is.

After our Lord gave the parable, He said to His disciples, “It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 13:11).

Now we want to look at this parable that deals, as do all of them in Matthew 13, with the subject of the kingdom of heaven.

Just what is the definition of the kingdom of heaven? It is a very difficult term for the simple reason that all sorts of theological divisions are current on this particular point. Frankly, I feel it can be reduced to the lowest common denominator and be made very simple. What is the kingdom of heaven? It is the reign of the heavens over the earth. And when that takes place, you have the kingdom of heaven here upon this earth. In the measure to which the kingdom of heaven reigns on this earth today, you have it here. For instance, where there is a life yielded to Him and doing His will, *there* is the kingdom of heaven right here upon this earth – even today.

Let us go back to the Book of Genesis and pick up a verse to determine if this is consistent with Scripture. In Genesis 1:26, which records God’s creation of man, God says:

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

The key here is the little word “dominion.” God says that He is creating man that he might have dominion. God not only created Adam a human being, but He created him a king and gave him a dominion, and that sovereignty was over this earth. Adam was to rule it. He had authority over all creatures on this earth. He could speak as the Lord Jesus spoke when He said to Peter, “Go down to the sea, catch a fish, and you will find money to pay our taxes in the fish’s mouth” (see Matthew 17:24-27). And Peter went down, caught a fish, and found in its mouth the tax money. Why? Because that fish was obeying Jesus Christ. I believe Adam could have said to the wind, “Blow,” or, “Stop blowing,” and it would have obeyed him. I believe Adam could have commanded it to rain on the back forty, and it would have rained on the back forty. Adam had domi-

nion over this earth. But he lost that authority when he sinned, which was in essence rebellion against the will of God. The sin of man cost him his dominion.

The question has always been: Who got that dominion when Adam lost it? I believe that Satan got it. He is the one who tempted Eve, and Satan is the one who rules this earth today. Remember that he came to the Lord Jesus in the wilderness and showed Him the kingdoms of this world and said, “All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me” (Matthew 4:9). Now you will recall that the Lord Jesus said to James and John, “The places on my right and on my left hand are not mine to give” (see Matthew 20:23), but He did not say to Satan, “The kingdoms are not yours to give.” Apparently they were. Satan is the ruler today of the kingdoms of this world. He took the scepter, and from that moment on God began a program whereby *He* is going to take over this universe again. He will do it, of course, in His own way. Hence the kingdom of heaven became the great theme of Old Testament prophecy.

If you have studied the Book of Isaiah, you know that the great pulsating thought of Isaiah, the passion of his life – even in that dark day when the Assyrian army was encamped outside Jerusalem – was the coming of the Redeemer. Isaiah looked down into the future the farthest, he saw the brightest hope, he saw a Redeemer come, he saw a King come, he saw One who is going to sit upon the throne of David and bring to this earth righteousness and peace and joy. This was the great pulsating hope of the Old Testament. Therefore, the Old Testament was a book that revealed an expectation, a *great* expectation, that the kingdom would come. The Old Testament made preparation for the coming King. And the King came!

Standing on the threshold of the New Testament we find that He

is rejected. There is a realization of the kingdom, but not now – it is yet in the future. There is to be a consummation of all things. The kingdom is coming. Therefore it is a progressive term. Throughout the eternal ages, “kingdom” will never be a static term. That is what Isaiah said in speaking of the King: “Of the increase of his government...there shall be no end...” (Isaiah 9:7). It will constantly increase and develop. There will never be anything static about heaven.

In Scripture we discover that the kingdom has moved through several stages. Back in the Old Testament it was a hope; it was an expectation. Now, since the King has been rejected, what has happened to the kingdom? What is its present condition? The answer is found in Matthew 13, which is the reason these seven or eight parables are elevated to such importance – they reveal the present manifestation of the kingdom.

Now let me be technical for a moment. It is fatal to any biblical interpretation to make the kingdom of heaven a synonymous term with the church. One does not equal the other. While it is true that the church is in the kingdom of heaven today, the kingdom of heaven is a broader term and is more accurately described as Christendom. Every place the Word of God is preached produces a kingdom of heaven condition, but in no place has any section of the world been totally converted and everyone brought into the church. So what you have in the parables of Matthew 13 is a picture of the present hour in which we live. This chapter reveals the present state of the kingdom.

In these parables, the Lord Jesus reached out in life and chose the simplest stories to illustrate the sublimest truths. They are tremendous when you begin to look at them. He took the commonplace to set forth the remarkable. He took the ordinary to reveal the extraordinary. He reached out into the natural in order to give

truth concerning the supernatural. He employed the parable, for which the simplest definition still holds good – an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. When our Lord began His parable by saying, “Behold, a sower went forth to sow,” He was picturing one of the most familiar sights in Palestine. They had seen it hundreds of times. And it is a familiar sight in America today. All the way from Pocatello, Idaho, to Pensacola, Florida, they are sowing seed in the spring of the year. All the way from Chicago, Illinois, to Rancho Cucamonga, California, sowers are going forth to sow. All the way from Minneapolis, Minnesota, to Muleshoe, Texas, sowing is a familiar sight. “Behold, a sower went forth to sow” – you can’t get anything more familiar than that to illustrate spiritual truth.

Now the interpretation of this parable is very simple. Only a theological professor could miss it! Ordinary folk such as you and I do not see a lot of complication. It is very simple because Christ gave us the interpretation. He has identified each part and phase of this parable.

First of all, the sower. Who is he? Let’s first identify him since he happens to be central in the parable. In Matthew 13:37 where our Lord interpreted the parable of the wheat and tares, we read: “He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man.” By this we know that He, Himself, the one who spoke the parable, is the sower. This defines the work of the Lord Jesus Christ with reference to the world today.

What is Christ doing today? Oh, I know, the saints like to say that He ascended to heaven and is sitting at God’s right hand, but if you interpret that to mean that He is doing nothing, you miss it. He said, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). He is busy today. But what is He doing? He is the King, but He has been rejected. And since He has been rejected He has taken

off His crown, He has put it to the side. He has taken off His royal robe and has put on the clothes of a *farmer*. He is sowing seed in the world today. Sowing seed is His business.

Now let's define that in spiritual terms. Let's translate it from agriculture to theology. What is He sowing? What is this seed that our Lord is sowing in the world? We do not have to guess. In Matthew 13:19 we read, "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom...." What, then, is the seed? It is the Word. The Bible that I hold in my hand is the seed. And there is life in it. It is just as potent as any seed planted in the ground. The Word of God is seed.

What is the field where the seed is being sown? Matthew 13:38 gives the answer: "The field is the world...." So now we have the sower identified, we have the seed identified, and we have the field identified. This is the picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Sower, taking the Word of God and sowing it in the world. That is His business today.

Again I want to remind you that the field is not the church, it is Christendom. The field is the world today.

Some Seed.

And he spoke many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow. (Matthew 13:3)

He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man. (Matthew 13:37)

A Sower went forth to sow, and that Sower is the Son of man. I repeat this because it is so important. It defines the present-day activity of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is His contemporary work – sowing seed, sowing the Word of God in the world.

In this day He is rejected as King and as Savior. Nonetheless, He is not defeated. The kingdom is coming, and while the kingdom is in abeyance He is dressed as a farmer sowing seed. His plans have not been interrupted. Many speak of the postponed kingdom. Personally, I do not like that expression because I do not think He has postponed anything. This thing is running according to His plan. It was not postponed from His viewpoint – it may be from our viewpoint, but not from His. Regardless of that, this is the day for sowing seed.

Now we do need to make a distinction here. I do not want to quibble nor split hairs, but follow me for a moment. The preaching of the Word is commonly called the harvest. Yet harvest time is not the picture for today; the picture for today is sowing time. Somebody says, “But didn’t Jesus say, ‘Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest?’” Yes, He did, but do you know in what connection He said it? It is well to put Scripture where it belongs. Notice Matthew 9:36-38:

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they were faint, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest.

In the very next chapter He sends them forth. Where does He send the laborers and what does He have them preach? He sends them to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, saying, “Go not to the Gentiles,” and He instructs them to tell the nation of Israel that the King is here. That was their message. To what does the harvest refer? It refers to judgment and to the end of the age. That is the picture. An age begins by God sowing seed; it ends by the harvest of both good and bad.

Besides the parable of the sower, we have another parable in Matthew 13 in which our Lord speaks along this very same line of harvest and judgment. He says concerning the wheat and tares:

Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn. (Matthew 13:30)

This is the end of the age, you see. Then notice verse 39:

The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age....

At the end of the age comes harvest time. That is one reason I think it is valid to say that we are harvesting today – we are glean- ing in the corners because we are at the end of an age. But let us understand one thing: We must sow before we can have a harvest. That is the reason I am insisting that our scriptural terms be accu- rate. Harvesting refers to judgment and the end of an age.

Notice another verse of Scripture dealing with harvest. It is a picture of the battle of Armageddon, one of the most frightful pictures in the Bible:

And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap; for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. (Revelation 14:15)

Obviously this is not evangelism at all. Rather it is judgment that is going to come upon this earth.

This is the scriptural picture of harvest.

Did the apostle Paul say that he was harvesting? In the Corin- thian church there were divisions on several subjects. One of the problems was that some of them liked Apollos better than they

liked Paul, and some liked Simon Peter more than they liked either one of the other two. Over this they were dividing the church – which was wrong. To divide churches on the basis of personalities is always wrong. Listen to Paul as he deals with this matter in his first letter to the Corinthians:

Who, then, is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?
(1 Corinthians 3:5)

Now see if Paul understood that he was out harvesting:

I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So, then, neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one; and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor.
(1 Corinthians 3:6-8)

Paul said that he was planting the Word. All we can do is plant. It is the Holy Spirit who gives the increase.

You see, sowing seed is a picture of Scripture. My business is sowing seed. What is your business? And, by the way, how *is* business? Are you sowing seed in this world? This is our business today.

Now let us understand something else very clearly. If you sow seed, there will be a harvest. The psalmist speaks of this:

He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. (Psalm 126:6)

But you cannot have sheaves for the Master until you have sown the seed that is the Word of God.

The reason I emphasize this is because I began my ministry in the Depression of the 1930s, and it was not only a depression

financially, but it was a depression spiritually. Those were difficult days for evangelism. I can remember several meetings in the church that I pastored when an evangelist would go through an entire week of meetings without a person responding. I can remember preaching in a little church in middle Tennessee for six straight nights before the Spirit of God ever spoke to a soul. Those were difficult days. Do you know why they were difficult? It was because the church had come through the era after World War I, off one of the worst “drunks” of unbelief and indifference that it had known up to that time. It was drunk on modernism that claimed we were going to build a new world, and the church forgot all about the Word of God. Until the Word of God is sown, friend, you cannot have anything to reap.

Some Seed?

We come now to the second point: Some seed, followed by a question mark.

Let us see the types of ground upon which the seed falls. There are four types of soil. Three-fourths of the seed does not fall on good ground. In fact, three-fourths of the seed dies. Nothing comes from it at all – not because there is anything wrong with the seed – it is the living Word of God. Do you know where the difficulty is? The difficulty lies with the soil. Now I believe in the doctrine of election, I believe it with all my heart. I wouldn't bother to preach if I did not believe in election, but the doctrine of free will is also true. The richness or barrenness of the soil determines what is going to happen to the seed.

You can be any kind of ground you want to be. It is up to you. I have the utmost confidence in the seed that I'm sowing, for it is the Word of God. But it is falling on four kinds of soil, and three-fourths of it will die. I know that. Sometimes a very sympathetic

person comes to me and says, “Dr. McGee, I just want to encourage you because you may not get a response to your message.” And my answer is always the same, “Don’t worry about that. I’m sowing seed. It’s not up to me to get results, it’s up to the Holy Spirit.” I am only the sower of the seed. The germination of the seed lies in the hands of the Holy Spirit and the soil upon which the seed falls.

Now as we consider the four types of soil, I wonder if you would get rid of your shovel if you have one with you today. A preacher said to me the other day, “Most of my members bring shovels to church. When I say something, they take their shovel and pitch it back, thinking, *That’s for Mrs. Jones back there.* And another, *That’s for Mr. Smith over there.*” Don’t use a shovel now, will you? Search your own heart as we look at these four types of soil.

Wayside Soil

Some seed fell by the wayside:

When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the wayside. (Matthew 13:19)

None of these who hear the Word are Christians – they are merely professors. The birds take the seed away. The birds by the way, as interpreted in another parable, represent the devil. The evil one takes away the seed. This happens to church members who are only professing Christians. They hear the Word, but it is not with the hearing of faith. For them the Word is not mixed with faith at all. They have a formal faith. They nod their heads in agreement, but to them Christianity is a sideline, it is a sideshow. They come to church once on Sunday, and that ends it for the week as far as they are concerned. I like to speak of these as the “deep-freeze” folk. The seed will be killed in the deep-freeze. These are the folk

who hear it, hear it for years – then finally fall off into some cult or ism.

A man said to me when I was a pastor, “Don’t get the idea that your church turns out one hundred percent members. I know one who is in a certain cult – he knocked at my door the other day.” I bow my head in shame; I’m afraid that is true. Although the seed that I sow is good seed, it does fall on some wayside soil.

Rocky Soil

The second type is rocky ground. Notice this:

But he that received the seed in stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and immediately with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself; but endureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, immediately he is offended. (Matthew 13:20, 21)

These are the rocky-ground hearers. The devil got the first type, the flesh gets these. These folk are opposite from deep-freeze folk. These are the emotional type – with joy they receive the Word. How excited they become! They are greatly moved, they shed tears, they have strong feelings. I call these the Alka-Seltzer type. They are effervescent; they bubble up when they hear the Word. But, believe me, after it is all gone they are dead.

Years ago, while sitting in the observation coach of a train coming out of Fort Worth, Texas, I saw somebody drop off a newspaper. When the rear of the train went by, that paper fluttered up and, oh, how it kicked up a fuss. As we moved on down the track I saw it settling down and finally going dead. As I looked at it, the thought came to me that it is like a lot of church members I know. When something special comes along they become excited and enthusiastic. But when it comes down to the real study of the Word of God they are dead. They are rocky-ground hearers.

Thorny Soil

There is a third group:

He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this age, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. (Matthew 13:22)

At the extreme ends of the economic ladder we see those with the cares of the world – the poor and the wealthy. The grimness of poverty and the gaiety of riches are the thorns of this life. Folk who fall into these two categories are the hardest to reach with the gospel.

These that fall among thorns I like to call the Model T Ford hearers. Do you remember the old Model T Ford? Have you ever heard one at night trying to get up a muddy hill? Oh, how it would struggle. There are a lot of professing Christians like that today. They struggle and strive, tears will come, and finally they give it up.

When I first came to Southern California, a man became quite excited about my Bible-teaching ministry, but he was always insisting that I become more and more evangelistic. In fact, one summer he wanted me to put up a tent for which he was willing to pay. Before long he left this area. After a time his wife returned alone. She had left him – had to leave him. He had become wealthy, was living with another woman, and had lost all interest in spiritual things. I asked her, “He seemed so zealous – what happened to him?” She said, “Making money made a fool out of him.”

The devil gets some, the flesh gets some, and the world gets some. The world, the flesh, and the devil are ready to take the seed that is sown. These are not different types of *believers*, they are not believers at all. They have only professed to believe the Word. Actually all three groups will read a message like this, but it will have no lasting effect.

Some Seed!

Good Soil

Finally we come to some seed!

But he that received seed in the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it, who also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. (Matthew 13:23)

Now these are believers – and there are different types of believers: hundredfold, sixtyfold, thirtyfold. Remember that our Lord, speaking to His own men in the Upper Room, said, “I am the vine, ye are the branches” (John 15:5), and then went on to say that His whole point was that they might bring forth fruit...more fruit... much fruit – thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and hundredfold. These are the three classes of real believers today.

There are two marks that identify genuine believers. The first mark is this: They receive the Word and they understand it. God has given to every believer the Holy Spirit who will interpret the Word of God and will give an understanding of it. Let me insert a word of warning here. It does not mean that you will understand everything that is in it, nor does it mean that you will not have to study the Word. It does mean that you will be given an aid that the unbeliever does not have. If you have a sincere desire to know, He will see that you understand.

One example of this truth is recorded in the eighth chapter of Acts. It tells about the Ethiopian who was riding across the desert, having been to Jerusalem, the capital city for religion in the world. He was reading the prophecy of Isaiah without any notion of its meaning, but because he was sincere, God brought him help. God said to Philip something like this, “Give up this evangelistic campaign that you are carrying on, and get down to the desert to speak

to this man.” Philip obeyed God and actually hitched a ride in the Ethiopian’s chariot. He climbed in and said to the man, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The Ethiopian very honestly said, “No, sir, to tell the truth I have no idea what I am reading. What in the world is Isaiah talking about? Is he referring to himself or to some other man?” Then Philip began at this Scripture and preached unto him Jesus – he could not have had a better text than the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah from which to preach Jesus. Philip explained that the One about whom Isaiah was writing was the Lord Jesus Christ who died on a cross just a few short years before the Ethiopian came to Jerusalem. Philip further expounded that the One depicted by Isaiah died a substitutionary death for the sins of the world, was buried outside Jerusalem, and arose from the dead right there. Philip told him that there were witnesses still living who had seen Him after His resurrection. The Ethiopian probably said, “I’ve been coming to Jerusalem every year and have never heard that before.”

He understood. He received the seed into good ground.

There is another distinguishing mark of all God’s children: They bring forth fruit. You see, God does not have any shade trees. All His trees are fruit-bearing trees. All the seed that He sows is capable of bringing forth fruit. Some will not bring forth as much as others. Actually, only one-quarter of the seed ever fell in good ground, and only one-third of that brought forth a hundredfold. That means, according to my arithmetic, that only one-twelfth ever really brings forth a real harvest. But that one-twelfth, believe me, is a bumper crop! However, the results come because of the work of the Holy Spirit. My business is just sowing the seed.

When God’s Word is faithfully taught, it falls on four kinds of ground. What kind of ground are you?

These are great days in which to sow this precious seed. I thank God for the privilege of sowing the Word of God day by day. Sowing is my business. What is yours? And how is your business?