

Strong, Healthy Faith

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Preacher: Pastor Sherry Mahar

[0 : 00] 2 Stay You Mat■■■ Am touched immediately Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to Pendleton Center and First United Methodist Churches in worship this morning. We'd like to invite you all to join together in our call to worship. This is the day that the Lord has made.

This is the day that the Lord has made.

[2 : 02] Let us rejoice and be glad in it. This is the day that the Lord has made.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it. This is the day. This is the day that the Lord has made.

Will you pray with me this morning? Dear God in heaven, pour your Holy Spirit into our hearts. Touch us wherever we are, Lord, to experience the wonder of God as we worship together.

Be with us. Bless us. Fill us with your presence. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. I'd like to invite you, if you're able to stand, as we're going to sing together, Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated.

Take My Life and Let It Be. Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.

[3 : 08] Take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of Thy love. Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice and let it be sung, always only for my King. Take my lips and let them be filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold, not a might could I withhold. Take my intellect and use every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it Thine, it shall be no longer mine. Take my heart, it is Thine own, it shall be Thy royal throne.

[4 : 39] Take my love, my love, my poor, at Thy feet and its treasure store. Take myself and I will be ever only all for Thee.

The Lord be with you. And also with you. Please be seated. This morning we are so grateful to have you here joining us in worship. We are glad that we can find a way to be together even though we're not together so much.

I do want to turn your attention to something we're calling our online friendship card. You can go in and put your name, put any information or notes you'd like to put on there, add your blessings or prayer concerns and we will share them.

We are glad to have you share with us that you're with us today in worship. I also wanted to mention that we have a fellowship group that meets online through Facebook. If you want to go to our Facebook page and join, they meet every night.

I went there the other night and saw one of our young people singing and telling stories and then they have a time for prayer afterwards. It's a great opportunity, a good way in the evening to kind of end your day.

[5 : 56] So we do call your attention to that. I also wanted to mention that we are trying to put together some fellowship groups, some small groups. They will probably talk about Bible studies or just some support opportunities.

There's even been a possibility that they might have some feedback about my Bible study on Wednesday night or possibly about the sermons. If you'd like to be part of a small group just to kind of gather with one another online in some sort of a fashion, please let Pastor Sherry Mahar know at the address that you see there because we'd love to have you do that.

This morning we are truly glad to have you gathered with us and I praise God for this day. It's a beautiful day. You know, it's been a while since we've had a beautiful day and I'm just excited to have the blessings of warm weather and spring starting to happen around us.

I'm glad to hear that they're making some progress in the science on these viruses. I'm glad to see some of the overall numbers going down. And I do think that there's some joys that we have to share.

I see people doing birthday parades and I see people sending out cards. There's a whole bunch of cards in our office from people who have just sent a note to the people who are working here. I've gotten some in the mail.

[7 : 17] We appreciate all the encouragement you can give, particularly giving it to the people who are struggling to find somebody to care for them. So we thank you for that and celebrate that blessing.

And we are thankful for God for all he gives to us. And so this morning we give an opportunity to bring our offering before God. It's a little different than the way we normally do it because we don't actually pass the plate, but we do have an opportunity on the internet where you can push the donate button and you can fill out a donation and send it in over the internet.

Or if you'd like, you can have it electronically withdrawn from your bank account or you can do it the old fashioned way and just write the church's address, 6864 Campbell Boulevard, North Tonawanda, 14120 on an envelope and send that right into the church.

We appreciate it because we're trying our best to keep the church connected as in every way possible. And your gifts go to support that. But we also know that it's a part of what we do to give our gifts and our concerns back to God.

So we pray that you will receive these gifts, Lord, and that you'll use them for the work that you want to do in this world. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.

[9 : 26] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

Dear God, thank you for the blessings that you give to us. Thank you for every day providing us with food, providing us with comfort. We thank you for the doctors and nurses.

[12 : 37] We thank you for all the blessings in our lives, and we give back to you our gift as a way of saying thank you for all you've done for us. Continue to bless our world, Lord, and pour out your healing touch.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Good morning, Junior Church, and all of our friends and all of our family who are all part of the body of Christ together with us.

We're continuing talking about the Lord's Prayer. Remember, we have it carved into this book that's in these beautiful hands representing who God is, that God has these wonderful words of wisdom and of guidance and of prayer that are the word of God that God has given to us so that we can have them.

And we talked about how holy God is, our God who art in heaven, our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Holy is your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And then the next line says, give us this day our daily bread. Now we can ask God for the things that we need, and God has promised that God will give them to us.

[13 : 57] He gives us everything we need because God loves us so very much. That's how come we know that God loves us, in fact. We know that God loves us because God has even given us our life.

We wouldn't have a life here on earth if it wasn't for God. As Jesus' disciples, we are different from other people. We can show God's love in a unique and a special way.

Because we know that love comes from God and that the only reason we have love in our hearts is because God is love and God lives in our hearts.

God fills us up with his love. I bet you remember how to do this one. I want you to get way down low. That's right. Way down low. Like we're all empty and we don't have any love in us at all.

But we know that God fills us up. He fills us up and fills us up and fills us up until we overflow.

[15 : 07] That's right. We overflow with God's love. Let's try one more time. Ready? He fills us up and fills us up and fills us up until we overflow.

That's right. And when God fills our hearts up with love, he's changing our hearts too. He's changing our hearts in ways so that we can love other people the way God loves them, the way God wants us to love them.

Jesus changes hearts so that we can love one another more and more with God's love. In John 13, it says that Jesus said to the disciples, a new command I give you, love one another.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another. And just loving people is a really, really good reason to love each other.

But there's another reason too. Jesus said the reason we want to love one another is because by loving one another, all people will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

[16 : 28] We want people to know about God's love. We want people to have their hearts changed too so that they will be able to love everybody.

Right? All right. So let's say that thing that we always say about God's love so that we can love one another and share God's love. Ready? Make a heart and come up.

Say, when God's love is in my heart, I can love everybody. That's right.

Say one more time now. When God's love is in my heart, I can love everybody. Now, I had an idea.

And I'm going to hang this in my window. I think what we need to do this week is draw a heart. Remember a couple weeks ago we drew a fish and we put that in our windows?

[17 : 23] Well, I bet you can draw a great big heart. And on your heart, have your mom or your dad or your older brother or sister, somebody help you to write on that. God's love is in my heart.

And then you can write your name. I wrote Pastor Lisa because Pastor Lisa is my name. But you could write your name right there. And then you can put it in the window. And everybody in your neighborhood will know that the love of God is in your heart.

And they will know that you are one of Jesus' disciples. That you have had your heart changed by the love of God. Now, we're going to watch that video and sing that song about changing my heart, oh God.

And when you see the video, I want you to look for all the hearts you can see. See if you can count them. Some of them are hiding. Some of them will be right out there for you to see.

And the more hearts you see, the more you can think about how God is changing your heart. Have a good week, friends. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you.

[18 : 29] God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. God bless you. Change my heart, oh God. Make it ever true.

Change my heart, oh God. God bless you.

May I be like you. You are the power.

I am the place. I am the place. Hold me and make me.

This is what I pray. This is what I pray. Change my heart, oh God.

[19 : 56] May I be like you. Change my heart, oh God. Change my heart, oh God.

May I be like you. God bless you. May I be like you. May I be like you. May I be like you. Change my heart, oh God Make it ever true Change my heart, oh God May I be like You Marsha Buhlman sent in our prayer focus for our prayer vigil this week.

And it's from Psalm 107, verse 6. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from distress. And she writes, God's people need not despair no matter what the situation may be.

According to this verse, the key is, don't stay silent. Cry out to God. He hears us when we cry out to him, and he's waiting to restore our hope.

Though he doesn't always take us out of our hard situation, he promises to always walk through them with us. So this week, Marsha says, cry out to God as you pray for our world to be delivered out of our present trouble.

[21 : 45] This morning, I wanted to share with you a couple of concerns. I know that Debbie Robichaux lost her mother last week. And also, I just found out that Shirley Duchar has gone in the hospital and is in pretty significant illness and sickness.

And so we do want to be in prayer for her as she's just gotten back in the area and now is in the hospital. With these and all the other concerns that we have for the people in our world and in our community and in our church, let's turn our hearts and our souls over to the Lord in prayer.

Dear God in heaven, you have poured out a blessing into our lives simply by being present with us. We pray, Lord, that your Holy Spirit would descend upon us to touch us and to fill us.

We dare, Lord, to offer up our petitions and concerns before you. We pray for Shirley. And we pray for Debbie.

We pray for all of those who are sick and ill and struggling, whether it be regular health concerns or whether it be related to the coronavirus or whatever it might be, Lord.

[22 : 57] We know that you are the great physician and we pray your healing touch on all of these people that they might experience the touch of God.

We pray also, Lord, for people who have lost someone they love, especially during this difficult time when it's so hard it's so hard to celebrate lives the way we normally do.

Be with people who are grieving, with people who are waiting, with people who are struggling the loss in their lives. We pray, Lord, for the people who have lost their jobs, whose finances have become a great hardship and who are facing difficulties and especially the question marks of what will be.

We all feel apprehensive, Lord, but we know some are facing even greater difficulties than others. We just pray, Lord, that you'll send your calmness upon them, that you'll open up their mind to the possibilities and that you'll open up the hearts of people around them to support them and help them.

We pray, Lord, for those who are working in the hospitals and the nursing homes and dealing not just with this virus but with all sorts of illnesses and struggles.

[24 : 22] We have for so many years not appreciated all that they do. Be with them. Send your protection around them. For those who are working out in the grocery stores or working security or making deliveries or all the many things that must happen so some people can remain safe, Lord.

We just pray for them. We pray for our seniors, the ones especially living in community homes of one type or another who are feeling as if they've been cut off for the world.

We pray for their safety. We pray, Lord, that you will give them a special blessing of your presence to touch them and be with them in this time so that they will know that they're not alone but that you're with them and that our love is with them.

We pray, Lord, for our leaders who are right now struggling to try and figure out what they're supposed to do as the next step. We pray, Lord, that you will guide them through this difficult time of discernment to understand what would be the right thing to do in a time when it seems like there's so many rights and so many wrongs and it's hard to choose which one we're supposed to do.

We pray for people who, in the midst of all this, have suffered from storms and tornadoes who are just feeling as if their world is coming apart.

[25 : 57] We pray for our children. We pray for our nation and our world. We just ask, Lord, that you'd be with us in the needs and concerns that we have in our hearts.

Listen, Lord, as each of us offers our prayers to you. And now, Lord, for this short time, pull away our worries and our troubles, our concerns.

Help us simply to celebrate your presence. As we hear the scriptures, Lord, help them to come alive to us. As Pastor Sherry brings a message, let it be a message from your lips to our hearts.

And all that we do and all that we are, Lord, be a blessing. In our lives, in our time together, and in our future, and in all eternity.

For it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. And now let's listen to the word of God. Merciful Savior, gracious Redeemer, Slow in your anger Rich in your love Full of compassion Longing to heal and bless You will forgive all of my sin If I will confess Here is my heart, Lord

[28 : 01] I lay it open Search every corner Cleanse every part Here is my heart, Lord Yielded and broken Merciful, Lord Come and restore Here is my heart Good morning.

Today's scripture reading is from Matthew 13, verses 3-12 and 18-23. Then he told them many things in parables, saying, A farmer went out to sow his seed.

As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow.

But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among the thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop, a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

[29 : 36] The disciples came to him and asked, Why do you speak to the people in parables? He replied, Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.

Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.

Listen, then, to what the parable of the sower means. When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart.

This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.

But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

[30 : 39] The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.

But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown.

This is the word of our Lord. Thanks be to God. Thank you, Linda. There is this note that I found from a little boy named Ben, and he's eight years old, and he was writing in his journal, and this is what he wrote about being homeschooled.

He says, Home to school. It is not going good. My mom's getting stressed out. My mom is really getting confused. We took a break so my mom can figure this stuff out, and I'm telling you, it is not going good.

Not going good. Well, sometimes going good is not easy. So we're in a sermon series right now about kingdom living. Living with God as our king in the world, but also inside of us.

[31 : 58] It's how all Christians are called to live. The establishment of God's righteousness in the heart of the believer. And that's what makes us a disciple. The disciple who does the will of God, our king.

But in this sermon series, we're not really talking about the actions of discipleship. Instead, we're taking a different look at it. Because honestly, most Christians understand what it is we're supposed to be doing as Christians.

We know the actions. We know we're supposed to be reading the Bible and going to worship, and we're supposed to be serving and caring and praying, and we're supposed to be doing all these things. It's being a Christian community.

We're supposed to be doing all these things, and we know that. But we wanted to examine what's underneath all that. What's the ground that is serving all of that within us?

What's the condition of our heart by grace? What are the inner attitudes of our heart as we walk through this life? Jesus said, On earth as it is in heaven.

[32 : 59] Out there, yes. But also in here. We want the kingdom of God within. Within us. Thriving. Growing deeper and stronger.

Day by day. Moment by moment. And this is called the process of sanctification. And sanctification is one of those churchy words. But it's an important word.

It means holy. To be made holy by the grace of God. And so we be made holy so that we can reflect our Savior, Jesus Christ. And so our set for this series is congregation under construction.

Congregation under construction. Because we really are. All Christians. All Christians are under construction with God. It's the sanctification process with us.

The kingdom of God being built within us through sanctifying grace. And Jesus tells us this parable. And it's about gardening. Now gardening.

[34 : 02] Right now it's the beginning of May. And it's a time when everything's starting to turn green. And I personally am getting kind of excited about gardening. I'm really excited.

But I know darn well that it's still cold out. It's cold out. And if I were to plant anything right now it wouldn't survive. So we just have to kind of wait and prepare.

And look forward to the promise. You know I posted on Facebook something about how I really wanted to get some seeds. And all the seed catalogs were sold out. And this wonderful woman named Cindy from Camp Findlay sent me seeds.

And she packed these big boxes full of seeds. And I opened it on Easter Sunday. And it was like Christmas. It's like all these seeds. Oh it's so wonderful. And I get all excited. I'm looking at these little seed packets.

I'm thinking these little tiny seeds. They have so much potential. So much promise. They're created to do something pretty amazing with a promise of growth.

[34 : 59] If I treat them right. See the seeds offer potential of what they can become. And we too have potential. A holy promise from God of what God's sanctifying grace can do in our life.

So we can become who God created us to be. Now this parable. There's two ways to look at it. There's the macro way. The seed of God.

About the kingdom of God. Being broadcast over the earth. And how are people receiving it. Are people accepting the saving grace of Jesus Christ or not.

And that's absolutely a teaching. It's perfectly acceptable. But for us today I wanted to look at it more in a micro level. How are we receiving the word of God?

How are we receiving the message of the kingdom every day and every moment? The Holy Spirit working within us. God continually sowing the seed within us.

[36 : 00] How are we receiving it? So Jesus is teaching this parable. About spreading the seed. The hope and promise of the kingdom of God. And he's seeing the impact.

Or sometimes the lack of impact. Some were very receptive. And they made big choices. And they changed their lives. And others had nothing to do with it.

Didn't want to accept it at all. And a lot of people were just really struggling. And I wish I could say. That when you become a Christian. All that goes away.

I wish I could say that. But it's not true. The reality is that continues on. It's a wrestling match throughout our Christian life. And I would like to suggest. That those different types of soil.

Are within all of us. To varying degrees. Just like in everybody's yard. You know this area is really great. And this area needs a little work. And so the seed is the message of the kingdom.

- [36 : 57] The seed that contains the force of life. And transformation. And encapsulates potential. But its actual future is open. And the success of the seed has nothing to do with the seed. And everything to do with where it lands. Growing in a good environment. If you've ever done gardening. You know you're more likely to get healthy plants. But if it's not in a great environment. You're not likely to have healthy plants. And you're likely to yield little to nothing. And some people sometimes say. God's work. God's word doesn't work. God's word. This whole Christian thing. It doesn't work. Nothing is different. And maybe they're saying that about others. Because they're not seeing a change in others. Maybe they're saying it about themselves. They're not seeing a change. Or experiencing a change within themselves. But the thing is. The seed doesn't change. And God doesn't change. Where it lands.
- [37 : 57] Is what needs to change. We've got to check the ground that it landed on. The sower and the seed that never changed. The condition of the soil. Is what changes the fruitfulness. And so we have to do examination. Self-examination. Self-reflection. We need to pray. What is it in my life, Lord. That I need to change. What do I need to work on. Are there any obstacles blocking me from growing. And I look at these types of soil. As obstacles to growth. Obstacles to our own spiritual growth. And so we have the first soil. The path. Those are people that hear the word. But they don't understand it. They don't accept it. It's not sown in their heart at all. It kind of bounces right off. It's like they may hear it in their head. But it doesn't ever really penetrate their heart.
- [38 : 57] They heard it. But they didn't really hear it. And the passage starts actually with Jesus saying. Listen. Listen. Listen. It means the spiritually sensitive people need to take note. Whoever has ears, let them hear. You know, it's possible to actually be active in a church. To actually be participating in worship. To actually hear the word. But in the process, really hear nothing at all. Because our heart is hardened. So why? What causes that? How do we become hardened? Well, there are areas in all of our lives, if we're honest with ourselves, that are hardened. Where we're not allowing God to get in there. We're unreceptive or unbelieving. Maybe we're questioning or we can't accept something. It might be forgiveness. It might be love.
- [39 : 57] It might be that we're blaming God. Or we're angry at God. Or it's challenging a belief. Something where we're being asked to change and we just really don't want to. And we start questioning. I don't get it. I don't understand it. I'm not going to accept it. It's kind of like in this coronavirus thing right now. And they said, this is a crisis. We need to shut down. We can't go anywhere. We can't do anything. We have to socially distance. We have to wear masks. And some didn't want to hear that. They didn't want to accept it. They got angry. They rebelled. They ignored it. The thing is, you can't ignore that. You have to pay attention to it. You have to follow it. Because not doing so is dangerous for yourself and for others. And the same thing is true with our spiritual life. Being hardened is dangerous for us and for others.
- [40 : 55] And there's things sometimes that we just don't want to accept. And we choose not to understand it. We don't go with it further. And we've developed a hardness in that area. And we don't want to focus on it.

But we have to focus on it. Otherwise, we won't have fruit in that area. It starts with questioning God. If we find ourselves questioning God or participating in willful disobedience, we have to be so careful.

It's so dangerous. You know, we think about Adam and Eve, for instance, in the garden. And they're questioning. Satan brought out the questions. Did God really say that?

Is God really good if he said that? Is that really what's supposed to be happening? Do you really want to follow that? And when we start thinking about all of these different questions, and we start building this thing against God because of it, it's a dangerous place to be.

We end up rejecting it. And it's dangerous because we then become vulnerable. When we're not receiving, when we're questioning, when we're blocking, when we're blaming, when we're not accepting, when we're hardened to the truth, we become vulnerable because we're not protected.

[42 : 09] We have no root. We're completely exposed. And the enemy comes and snatches it away. The birds of the air in this passage, that's the enemy coming, snatching it right away.

It doesn't have a possibility of growing. And Satan's number one purpose is to snatch that away from us. And so we have to be so careful.

I don't know how many of you have ever had a garden, and when you plant it and you watch it grow, and then you have to sit back and watch the crows just dive in and tear it apart.

I've done that. So frustrating. You're watching these crows come in and just come at this crop, and you're just like, ah, this is war.

War. You're not going to take my crop. You're not going to hurt my plants. This is war. And the same thing is true in our spiritual life. This is war.

[43 : 10] Spiritual warfare. We have to recognize when we're doing this and not accept it. We need to fight. We need to be in spiritual warfare.

And some of us may be saying right now, not me. This isn't me. I'm not. All of us are in a position where we're not living a perfect life. And God's word says what we should be doing and what we shouldn't be doing, and the spirit reveals it to us.

And so there must be some area in our life where this needs to be addressed. Because these are choices. These are choices that we're making.

And it means that we've got a hardened heart and some area of our heart that we're not surrendering to Jesus. And so we need to cast that attitude away and open our hearts to the truth.

The second type of soil is rocky ground. And it says that at once they received it with joy. With joy. But then they had no roots.

[44 : 16] They were shallow. You know, when Jesus was talking about discipleship, about following him, he talked about the cost of discipleship. And sometimes we're just not ready for that.

We say, wow, us? I don't know. Does that ever happen to us? I think so, probably. It's happened for me, very certainly.

I mean, have you ever been there where you say, wow, that's great. I want to join in. Woo, yeah, that's great. And then you get into it and you're like, this is hard. This is not what I thought I was signing up for.

This is a lot more effort and time than I ever anticipated. I don't know if I want to do this. It is good to receive with joy. Absolutely. It's good to grow quickly.

Absolutely. But the thing is, when you have no roots to support it, you're going to burn out. It said that they grew up really quickly and got too close and burned out.

[45 : 17] They were burned, scorched. Well, that's not good. It's a lot of times where it grows up so full and strong and it's like shallow and it's got lots to show, but nothing supporting it.

Roots take time. Roots take effort. You've got to grow into the dirt. It's messy and nobody sees it. When there's trouble, there will always be trouble.

If we don't have strong roots, we will fall away quickly. It's kind of like having a faith that's like a Santa Claus faith. God is like a Santa Claus and it's really focused more on ourselves.

It's focused on me. You know, it's all about show. And then as soon as that happens, we just want to call it quits. We get burned out.

We get scorched. Do you ever get burned out? Do you ever get burned in something? You want to just fall away? You just want to quit? And thinking just, I don't know if I want to do this Christian thing anymore.

[46 : 22] I mean, how many of us can say in our Christian walk that everything about being a Christian has been perfect the whole time? Right?

Probably not. I mean, the thing is, we're in the Christian faith along with other people. And what we're expected to do is to be in relationship with other people who are going through stuff too.

And it's hard sometimes. And we're expected to be serving and living a life that sometimes means sacrifices. And sometimes it's frustrating. And sometimes it's difficult.

You know, in this coronavirus thing, a lot of people are really frustrated. A lot of people are really blown away by all the extra work and the stress of it all.

Well, I mean, just think about doing groceries alone and preparing to go to a grocery store. And you've got to make sure you have the entire list because you don't want to go there very often. And when you do, you've got to wear the mask and you've got to wear the gloves.

[47 : 27] And you've got to make sure you're doing hand sanitizer. And when they come in, it's a whole process of where are the groceries coming and how are we wiping them off? And how are we handling things? And, oh, my goodness, it's a lot.

And you just every once in a while say, I don't want to do this anymore. I just want to get my groceries. I don't want to do it. But we do it.

We need to eat. And we want to live. And so there are things that we do that may be difficult, but they are worth it.

We have essential workers out there, and they're doing a job with the possibility of getting this virus. There are many things in life that are difficult.

But they're worth it. You know, I used to say that I love being a gardener. And I kind of changed that over the past few years.

[48 : 28] I am not a person who loves being a gardener. I am a person who loves gardens. Different. Totally different.

You know, do I love going out there and seeing all of the veggies? And all the beautiful fruit and the beautiful flowers and things like that?

Yeah. I love that. I love going out and seeing it all tidy and just beautiful. I love it. Love. Do I love gruelingly digging in the dirt and weeding and pruning and figuring out how to get rid of slugs and all the other creepy crawly things?

Do I love that? No. I mean, I'll do it for a little while. But real soon into it, I'm like, no, you know, I'm kind of done with that.

I don't want to do that anymore. And you start looking around. It's like, really? Did that shrub grow more? Are there weeds again? I just, I get, I personally get to the point where I just want to be done with it.

[49 : 30] I just want to quit. You know, our yard has clay and it's rocky. It's just garbage soil. When we bought our property, they had stripped all the topsoil off of it.

And we didn't know that. But you can't grow anything in it. We ought to work, work, and work. And God bless DJ. He works his tail off. And I try. But he's much more patient with it than I am.

But, you know, we do keep working on it. We keep working on it because we know it's worth it. The end is worth it. There's potential there. There's promise there. It's worth the effort to get our hands dirty.

And so we think about it with ministry, with discipleship, with following Jesus, with being in a church family. I mean, sometimes it's difficult. Sometimes it may be so difficult that we may be tempted to say, this is too difficult.

It's too painful. I don't want to do it anymore. But we have to recognize that it's worth it. And when we recognize that it's worth it, we push through to the end.

[50 : 37] We push through. Amen? The rocky places produce lots of enthusiasm. But we've got to make sure that we're digging deep and putting in those effort.

We need to make sure that we're digging roots. Who God is. Discovering who God is and who we are in Christ. And holding on to those roots so that we don't burn out and we don't get tempted to quit.

Because what we're doing matters. If we're working with ministry or with a church family, we know that it takes patience and effort. But it's worth it to dig deep and get our hands dirty.

Because in all those times, we need to remember why we're doing it and who we're doing it for. And get rooted in the promise of God. And the third type of soil.

Thorns. These are the people who hear the word. But then the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke out the word. Making it unfruitful.

[51 : 40] There's a competition in all of our lives. Time and resources spent with God versus everything else. And we can have the best of intentions. You know, we have every intention to read the Bible and pray and worship and give.

We can have all the best intentions. But we actually have to make the time to be with God. And we are in competition. Our entire life is in competition with that. For our time, our resources, and our focus.

Anyone else have a massive to-do list? The to-do list. The piles of things that all have to be done. The stuff of life.

Anybody else have this? The list that is not humanly possible to have done? How many of us actually write something in that we just did that wasn't on the list so we can cross it out?

I mean, it's just a crazy long list for some of us. And all this stuff, the stresses of life, it chokes out the seed growing within us. When we're seeking out the wrong things, Jesus said, the deceitfulness of wealth.

[52 : 51] That's an interesting term, deceitfulness of wealth. The desires of affluence. That's a false promise. All this stuff. And we end up thinking to ourselves, you know, when I get everything on my to-do list done, or when I have so much money, or when I have acquired whatever, then I'll be happy.

Then I'll be fulfilled. But that's not true. I mean, first of all, the to-do list is never, ever done. Anybody have a to-do list that actually ever gets done?

But secondly, you know, there's this phrase, I'm told that it's by Bob Marley. I'm not sure about that, but I'm told it's by him. And he said, you know, some people are so poor, all they have is money.

It makes you think. I mean, we're in this coronavirus thing, and we have a stock market crash.

People are out of work. There's scary times. And the reality is we all need money to survive, and we all need things. There's things that we all have to do.

[54 : 07] But in all of that, in all of that, what is our attitude? What's the condition of our heart? I mean, what really caused people to start hoarding toilet paper, and now they're hoarding meat?

What causes that? What's the condition of somebody's heart that goes and does that? We're chasing after the wrong things, seeking more and more and more, thinking it's going to give us fulfillment, when really we need to seek the fulfillment of God.

In Matthew 6, starting in verse 28, Jesus starts talking about how we shouldn't be worried about all this stuff. You know, God's going to provide it. And sometimes I read that, and I'm like, yeah, but God, but do you know what my situation is?

But God said, listen, I've got this. And that passage actually ends with, seek first, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

So the seed, the kingdom of God, is seeking to grow within us. But the thing is, there's nothing wrong with that soil, except that there's no room.

[55 : 26] It's occupied. There's no room for the seed to grow. It's struggling for light and water and nutrients and space, and it gets choked out within us, because instead, it's growing luxurious thorns.

In my garden, not only did I inherit clay and rocks, but I inherited pricklers. Pricklers. Not easy to yank. A couple years ago, I was working full-time, in seminary full-time.

I was crazy busy. Too busy. And my garden, part of my garden, became a garden full of pricklers.

Pricklers. Big pricklers. Like trees. Pricklers. I mean, you can't even pretend they're wildflowers. Pricklers. If you know what I'm talking about. I mean, they just can't.

There were pricklers everywhere. And we just, there was no way that anything I was going to plant in there was going to grow, unless I got rid of those pricklers.

[56 : 30] And that was hard. That was very hard. And it happens to us all sometimes. If we allow that stuff to take over, if we won't allow that seed to germinate in our lives, the busyness and the stuff will choke it out.

It'll choke out what God wants to do in our life. So we need to recognize the area in our life where we have thorns. And we need to make room, make time, make space.

We need to set our priorities. And get rid of all those distractions. Clear away that clutter. And focus on what really matters. And what really matters is that we are in relationship with God.

Amen? I mean, what really matters is that we draw closer to God, becoming sanctified. I mean, none of us have become entirely sanctified yet.

But we have all these different kinds of soils within us, all these different areas in our life. And maybe those soils that need some tending is just a corner of your garden.

[57 : 41] Or maybe it's taken up the whole garden. But you know, if we don't take care of that, it may end up taking over our entire life. I know that I have some gardening to do in my life.

And I suspect you do too. And so I'd like to invite you to a prayer of confession along with me. Lord, I have sinned. You know the soil of my heart.

I repent. I repent of anything that is keeping me from you. Any time when I have not followed you.

Any time when I put myself above you. Forgive me, Lord. Fill me with your spirit. Reveal to me what you would have me change.

And empower me to do it. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

[58 : 48] Hear the good news. Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. And this proves God's love for you and for me. In the name of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven.

Glory to God. Amen. See, the good news is that the sower, our good God, continuously sows. The more we make fertile ground, the more we grow.

The more we become sanctified and become who God created us to be. And so we have the fourth soil, the good soil, that receives the word, understands it, not just in our head, but in our heart.

And it produces fruit, abundant, plentiful harvest. So what is fruit? Well, in our gardens, fruit are the flowers. Fruit are the veggies. Fruit is fruit.

Fruit. But in our faith life, fruit is fruit of the spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

[59 : 51] That kind of fruit. What kind of fruit is it? It's discipleship. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. That kind of fruit.

It's sharing your faith and having others come to Christ because of your testimony. It's that kind of fruit. What kind of fruit? It's all of that. That kind of fruit.

God has so much in store for us. That little seed being planted, that little seed within us has so much potential, so much promise.

The kingdom within us planted deep from the sower who loves us always. That never, ever changes. And so we grow in the fruit of the spirit, in devotion, in discipleship, transformed, sanctified.

and then that flows out in fruitfulness on earth as it is in heaven. God has so much to give.

[60 : 50] We are all created with so much potential, so much promise, so much love. But the seeds of grace need to land on good soil. And the way the soil of our lives becomes good soil, our heart becomes good soil as we come to Jesus.

When we're hardened and defiant, we come to Jesus who forgives and guides. When we're vulnerable, we come to Jesus who gives protection and power.

When we're weak and we're struggling, we come to Jesus who gives strength. When we're wounded by the world or even inside the church, we come to Jesus who heals.

when we're worried and we're carrying burdens, we come to Jesus who provides and carries our burdens for us. When we are distracted and busy and tempted, we come to Jesus for fulfillment and love.

And when we recognize we have sinned, we come to Jesus for mercy and grace. and when we come to Jesus, the soil of our heart becomes good soil, good soil that will allow the kingdom of God to not only grow but to thrive, producing an abundant harvest for everyone that comes to Jesus.

[62 : 21] Weak and wounded sinner Lost and left to die Raise your hand for love is passing by
Come to Jesus Come to Jesus Come to Jesus Come to Jesus And live How your burdens
lifted And carried far away Precious blood Has washed away The sling

So sing to Jesus Sing to Jesus Sing to Jesus And live Like a newborn baby Don't be afraid to fall Remember when you walk Sometimes we fall For adult

So if your sky is dark and pours the rain, Cry to Jesus, cry to Jesus, Cry to Jesus, amen.

Oh, and when the love spills over, And music fills the night, And when you can't come, take your joy inside.

Dance for Jesus, dance for Jesus, Dance for Jesus and live.

[65 : 29] With your final heartbeat, Kiss the world goodbye, And grow in peace and love, Our glory is done.

Fly to Jesus, fly to Jesus, Fly to Jesus, and live.

Come to Jesus, dance for Jesus, Fly to Jesus, and live.

Fly to Jesus, and live. Fly to Jesus, and live. Lars sons Eigas Käs bag Here is this Lord and we're in land Where many dream has died Like a tree planted by the water We never will run dry So we're in water flowing through, God we thirst for more of you.

Fill our hearts and flood our souls with one desire. Just to know you and to make you know, we lift your name on high.

[67 : 36] Shine like the sun, big light, this run at night. We know we were made for so much more than ordinary lives.

Time for us to mourn and just survive. We were made to thrive. Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh.

In your word, we're making dreams to know our Father's heart. Into the world, we're reaching out to show them who you are.

It's a living water flowing through, God we thirst for more of you. Fill our hearts and flood our souls with one desire.

Fill our hearts and flood our souls with one desire. Just to know you and to make you know, we lift your name on high.

[68 : 58] Shine like the sun, big dark, this run at night. We know we were made for so much more than ordinary lives.

It's time for us to mourn and just survive. We were made to thrive. Joy unspeakable, faith unsinkable, love unstoppable.

Anything is possible. Joy unspeakable, faith unspeakable, love unstoppable, anything is possible.

Just to know you and to make you know we lift our name on high, shine like the sun, make darkness run and hide.

We know we were made for so much more than ordinary lives. It's time for us to mourn and just survive.

[70 : 28] We were made to thrive. We were made to thrive.

We were made to thrive. The Lord be with you.

Lift up your hearts. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right and a good and joyful thing always and everywhere to give thanks to God Almighty, the sower of the seeds of faith, the sower of the seeds of grace, the sower of the seeds of love to you and to me and to everyone always and continuously such great grace offered to all of us.

And God wants to work within us, having that soil become prepared to receive that grace. And we want to respond in return. And so there are so many ways that we can respond in this time.

It's a crisis. And we're going to look back on this. And we're going to remember all of the difficulties. We are. But at the same time, I really hope that as Christians, we'll also remember that we took the time to remember and reflect upon what really matters.

[72 : 04] love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. And there are so many ways to live that out. So if you want to grow in your faith, I invite you to join one of the new small groups that are starting up.

Contact the office if you want to get involved in that kind of discipleship. Or maybe you're somebody who wants to do the devotions and prayers, but also be an encourager and a supporter of others.

I invite you to join our Facebook group. If maybe you are somebody who is wanting to help by helping people in need, contact Gidget Meeland.

And we are still feeding the homeless. We're still doing the community dinner in Niagara Falls. We're still having people make masks. We just checked the bin earlier and people are taking them.

In fact, we need more. If you're able to make masks, we ask that you make more. Maybe you are experiencing some wonderful things with worshiping at home or just trying to figure out this whole thing at home.

[73 : 08] And you want to take some pictures and share some stories. Share it. Share the joy. Share the humor. Share the things that are uplifting. For all of your graduates out there, if you're a graduate, we invite you to send us your picture and a little note about what your future plans are.

We'd love to share that with our church family. And in all of this time, one of the greatest things we can all be doing is pray. Pray. Pray. Pray that in this time, many, many people will come seeking God, accepting Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

And pray that those who have been disconnected from the church for a while, whether because they got too busy or maybe because they got hurt, whatever the reason, that people who had been disconnected reconnect.

They reconnect with their faith. Reconnect with the church family. And pray that all of us as Christians grow deeper, stronger, more faithful, more grace-filled so that we can be grace-filled for others.

And so we light the candle. We light the candle and we keep it lit within ourselves and for the world.

[74 : 27] The sanctifying grace of God within us on earth as it is in heaven. I invite you to pray the Lord's Prayer along with me. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[76 : 19] Since Jesus came into my heart Had no dark clouds of doubt Now my pathway obscure
Since Jesus came into my heart Since Jesus came into my heart Since Jesus came into
my heart Bloods of joy, O my soul Like the sea billows froze Since Jesus came into my
heart When I was listening to Pastor Sherry preach I was thinking of these little packets I
used to get called sweepings They would just sweep up all the different seeds from the
floor When they were making the seed packets And you never knew what they were going
to be You'd put them in the ground, they'd grow whatever they'd be God wants to do
something special with you We don't know what it's going to be It's going to be something
amazing though If you let God be planted in your heart

Don't go into the shallow soil Don't let the weeds choke you out Get some deep roots And
you're going to blossom into something We're not sure what it is, but it'll be amazing May
God be planted in you Deep and strong And may he bless you this day And forever more
with his grace Go in the peace of the Lord May God be with you Stay safe Thank you You