

2 Testimony and The Tree of Life

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The spiritual goal of any active member of The Church of Jesus Christ should be to partake of the fruit of the Tree of Life—to taste that which is sweet and pure, finding "joy in the redemption," as mother Eve explains. Coming unto the tree is not enough. There must be faith to endure to the end, having the strength to not only pass through the mists of darkness but also become as the grain that is separated from the chaff on the threshing floor of life. This is a motif not only discussed by prophets but by the Savior Himself in the New Testament.

Every Parable in scripture is directed to members of the church i.e., those who know and understand the gospel. Each parable presents subtle and solemn warnings about personal faith and testimony while pointing out the connection between their activity in the gospel and salvation. There is a difference between one's activity in the Church and one's activity in the Gospel; therefore, the need for the parables. Like Lehi's dream of the Tree of Life, the Savior in the Parable of the Sower describes four types of church members. This parable is about internal spiritual depth and strength of faith and testimony, not one's level of activity in the church.

3 And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;

4 And when he sowed, some seeds fell by *the way side*, and the fowls came and devoured them up:

5 Some fell upon *stony places*, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:

6 And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

7 And some fell among *thorns*; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:

8 But other fell into *good ground*, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

(Matthew 13:3-8)

"*The Seed*" is "the word" (Alma 33:1). *The Ground* is the heart. Faith and testimony of the individual is their relationship with the seed and "*The Word*" which is Christ (Alma 34:6).

Whether the seed of Christ finds fertile ground or not has less to do with one's activity in church (as with the Pharisees in Luke) than with one's activity in the Gospel, for it's the activity in the Gospel which leads to *the exercise of faith in Christ and his Atonement unto repentance*.

Lehi sees the identical types of believers in his dream of the Tree of Life. Both the Sower parable of Christ and the dream of Lehi explain why some members may fail in their testimony or fall away from the gospel. In every case, the loss of faith or falling away boils down to the individual's testimony and their relationship to the word, which is in Jesus Christ and His Gospel. Nephi said that all 'must liken the scripture unto themselves' (1 Nephi 19:23), so each member should be able to find themselves in the spiritual descriptions offered by Christ and His prophet Lehi. Below, the four groups found in the Parable of the Sower are compared to the four groups in Lehi's Dream.

The Way Side

Matthew 13	1 Nephi 8
<p>19 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.</p>	<p>21 And I saw numberless concourses of people, many of whom were pressing forward, that they might obtain the path which led unto the tree by which I stood. 22 And it came to pass that they did come forth, and commence in the path which led to the tree. 23 And it came to pass that there arose a mist of darkness; yea, even an exceedingly great mist of darkness, insomuch that they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost.</p>

The “way side” represents those who have not taken the necessary time or effort to understand the gospel or develop a personal testimony founded in the Savior and His Atonement. Many individuals, and in particular the youth, rely on the borrowed or reflected light and testimony of parents and others to remain active. When alone and away from the reflected light of others, they will be faced with the trails and temptations of mortality. The “evil one” then finds it easy to “catch away that which was sown in their heart” because they were already lost by their personal lack of understanding of the doctrine of Christ. Lehi adds the insight that they evidently let go of—or didn't bother to use—the “iron rod” that might have helped them remain on the path. The Iron Rod represents the scriptures, which, being the word of God, become the standard of truth that will not fail while on the path toward the Tree of Life. In Lehi' dream, it is made clear that **no one** makes it to the Tree of Life without holding on to the Iron Rod.

Stony Places

Matthew 13	1 Nephi 8
<p>20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;</p> <p>21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.</p>	<p>24 And it came to pass that I beheld others pressing forward, and they came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press forward through the mist of darkness, clinging to the rod of iron, even until they did come forth and partake of the fruit of the tree.</p> <p>25 And after they had partaken of the fruit of the tree they did cast their eyes about as if they were ashamed.</p> <p>26 And I also cast my eyes round about, and beheld, on the other side of the river of water, a great and spacious building; and it stood as it were in the air, high above the earth.</p> <p>27 And it was filled with people, both old and young, both male and female; and their manner of dress was exceedingly fine; and they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit.</p> <p>28 And after they had tasted of the fruit they were ashamed, because of those that were scoffing at them; and they fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.</p>

The “stony places” represent those members who are converted to the church but not the gospel, who quickly and enthusiastically embrace the church culture only to slide back into old ways and habits when things get the least bit hard. Without a foundation in Christ and a conversion to the gospel, they lack the faith to persevere in the face of opposition and quickly find reasons to leave. Embracing their old ways, the pride of their hearts will often lead them to seek the success and honor of men rather than God.

The Thorns

Matthew 13	1 Nephi 8
<p>22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.</p>	<p>31 And he also saw other multitudes feeling their way towards that great and spacious building.</p> <p>32 And it came to pass that many were drowned in the depths of the fountain; and many were lost from his view, wandering in strange roads.</p> <p>33 And great was the multitude that did enter into that strange building. And after they did enter into that building they did point the finger of scorn at me and those that were partaking of the fruit also; but we heeded them not.</p> <p>34 These are the words of my father: For as many as heeded them, had fallen away.</p>

Born in the church, these members are more concerned with the “cares of the world” (the fads, fashion, music and technology) than with developing a relationship with Christ. It has been said

that the definition of God is: *The motivating force of one's life*. These members focus their energies on the gods of *this* world: the gods of wood and stone (grand homes), the gods of metal and money (cars and mammon), and the gods of pride and selfishness.

The Good Ground

Matthew 13	1 Nephi 8
<p>23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.</p>	<p>30 But, to be short in writing, behold, he saw other multitudes pressing forward; and they came and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron; and they did press their way forward, continually holding fast to the rod of iron, until they came forth and fell down and partook of the fruit of the tree.</p>

Christ stated that: “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:14). The ‘rule of the remnant’ taught throughout scripture implies that there will always be a remnant that will be saved; an unknown number who are listening and remain righteous and faithful in their testimony of Christ and His Atonement, regardless of difficulties and temptations. The faithful remnant are members of the Church who unconsciously display their love of God and their fellow man, it being a natural expression of their discipleship. This love is the fruit of a true faith and testimony in Christ and his redemption. For a testimony to grow and be strengthened, the ‘good ground’ *must be prepared* to receive the seed. Once there, it should be nourished with the ‘good word of God’ and the faith of the fathers. This nourishment—scripture, faith, and activity—will eventually lead one to the Tree of Life where the fruit of the Love of God lies waiting for those who are prepared to take and eat.

As the dream of Lehi and the parable of the Sower explains, the enduring and exalting power of true testimony lies in the individual's heart and conversion rather than something external. All that seek the presence of God must actively work to be 'born again' and embraced in the arms of mercy. Everyone who desires the salvation and the mercy offered by the sacrifice of the Savior must not only partake of the fruit of the Tree of Life but remain faithful and endure to the end in that salvation offered by the Son of God.