

DAILY DEVOTIONAL

A 5-Day Reflection Guide

Joy



SERMON SERIES:
More than Fruit

WEEK & TOPIC:
WEEK THREE: DIRTY WORK

DATES:
AUGUST 31–SEPT 4, 2026

This Week's Big Idea

If I want different fruit in the next season, I'm going to have to do some dirty work in this one. The seed isn't the problem. God's living and enduring Word has already been planted in us, and His Spirit lives in us. But good seed doesn't automatically produce good fruit—the condition of the ground matters. Sometimes growth requires us to let God soften what has become hard, uncover what has remained buried, and deal with what is choking what He wants to grow.

More than Fruit

Day 1: The Seed Isn't the Problem

TODAYS SCRIPTURE

Mark 4:14 (NIV) “The farmer sows the word.”

1 Peter 1:23 (NIV) “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”



TODAY'S SEED

Have you ever looked at an area of your life where you weren't seeing much growth and thought, What's wrong? Why isn't anything happening? Maybe you've prayed about the same thing for years. Maybe you've tried to become more patient, more consistent, more loving or more disciplined. Eventually it's easy to think, Maybe I'm missing something. Maybe I need God to give me something I don't have.

Jesus tells a story in Mark 4 that challenges that thinking. A farmer goes out and scatters seed. Some falls on the path, some on rocky ground, some among thorns and some on good soil. The results are dramatically different. Some seed never grows. Some starts growing but doesn't last. Some grows but gets choked. And some produces thirty, sixty and even a hundred times what was planted.

But notice what never changes. **The seed.** Same farmer. Same seed. Different ground. Jesus even tells us exactly what the seed represents: **“The farmer sows the word.”** Then Peter takes that idea even further. He says we have

been born again through the “living and enduring word of God.” God has already planted something powerful in us. So, stop trying to get what you already have. Stop waiting for God to finally put potential in you. His Word is alive. His Spirit lives in you. You don't have to manufacture the fruit, you create the conditions and The Holy Spirit produces that fruit.

Maybe the problem isn't that you need better seed, maybe the ground just needs some work. A farmer doesn't look at a field that needs plowing, weeding or cultivating and declare, “This is bad ground.” He recognizes its potential and gets to work. God sees the potential in you too.

There may be some hard places that need softening. Some buried things that need uncovering. Some weeds that need pulling. That's dirty work.

Sometimes the difference between the fruit you have today and the fruit you want tomorrow is what you're willing to let God work on today.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

Peter calls God's Word **“imperishable”** seed. The Greek word is **aphthartos** (ἀφθαρτος), meaning incorruptible, imperishable, not subject to decay. Natural seed can lose its ability to produce life, but God's seed cannot. Peter's point is that the source of our new life is living and enduring. **The seed hasn't lost its power.** That shifts our attention from questioning what God has planted to examining the ground where it is growing.

DON'T MISS THIS

You don't need better seed. You need to give the seed better ground.

TEND THE GARDEN

Spend a few quiet moments reflecting.

1. Where in your life would you most like to see different fruit?
2. Have you been asking God to give you something He may have already planted in you?
3. What area of your heart might need some attention before deeper growth can happen?
4. Are you willing to let God get beneath the surface this week?

WATER THE SEED

Read **Mark 4:3–20** today and pay attention to one thing: the seed never changes, but the ground does. Ask the Holy Spirit, **“What kind of ground am I giving Your Word?”** Don’t try to fix everything today. Simply be willing to let Him show you where some work needs to be done.

GROW THIS IN ME

Father,

Thank You for the living and enduring seed of Your Word. Thank You that Your Spirit lives in me and that I’m not trying to manufacture the life You have already placed within me. Help me stop blaming the seed when the ground needs attention. Show me the places in my heart that need to be softened, uncovered, cleared or cultivated. Give me the courage to let You work beneath the surface. I believe there is more potential in what You have planted in me than I can see today. Prepare the ground so Your Word can take root, grow deep and produce the fruit You desire in my life. I’m willing to do the dirty work.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

**GOD PRODUCES THE FRUIT. WE CREATE THE CONDITIONS.
STAY CONNECTED TO THE VINE. STAY PLANTED. TRUST THE
PROCESS. THE FRUIT IS COMING.**

LOOKING AHEAD

Day Two – When Soft Ground Gets Hard

A path wasn’t always hard. It became hard because people repeatedly walked over it. Tomorrow we’ll look at how hurt, disappointment and even our own emotional pacing can harden places that were once soft—and how God can begin to redeem the path.



More than Fruit

Day 2: When Soft Ground Gets Hard

TODAYS SCRIPTURE

Mark 4:4 (NIV) “As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.”

Mark 4:15 (NIV) “Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.”



TODAY'S SEED

Have you ever tried digging in what looked like perfectly good ground and suddenly—**clang!** You hit a rock. From the surface, you didn't see it because there was dirt over it. Grass may have even been growing around it. But once you started digging deeper, you discovered something buried underneath. Jesus says that can happen in us.

5The seed that fell on rocky ground actually began to grow. From the surface, everything looked promising. The problem wasn't what people could see. The problem was underneath. There wasn't enough depth for the roots. Yesterday we looked at the path—**what others have done to me.**

Today gets a little more personal. The rocks represent **what I've allowed to remain in me.** Someone may have genuinely hurt you. That happened **to you** . But bitterness can be what you allowed to remain **in you** . Someone disappointed you is what happened to you. But resentment, offense or unforgiveness may be what remained in you. And eventually your roots keep hitting the rock.

That's when something happening in one relationship begins affecting another relationship that had nothing to do with it. An old offense shapes a new conversation. Yesterday's disappointment affects today's opportunity. We wonder why the same things keep breaking, and the problem may have nothing to do with what's happening on the surface. Our roots keep running into something buried underneath. It's possible to look good on the outside while carrying things beneath the surface that keep us from going deeper.

Bitterness. Resentment. Offense. Pride. Envy. Unforgiveness. God doesn't uncover those things to shame us. He exposes them because He wants something better for us. Maybe you've been asking, **"Why isn't anything growing?"** And God is saying, **"There's a rock here. Let's deal with it."** That's dirty work. But God loves you too much to let something buried yesterday keep breaking what He wants to grow tomorrow.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

The Greek word translated **"path"** is **hodos (ὁδός)** , meaning a way, road, path or route of travel. The word can describe more than a piece of ground—it can describe a **way of going somewhere** . That gives Jesus' picture another layer. Repeated hurt can create familiar routes in the way we think, react and relate to others. But Scripture also uses hodos for God's way. The old path doesn't have to remain the only way you know. God can soften the ground and teach you a new way to walk.

DON'T MISS THIS

Your path may explain where you've been, but it doesn't get to determine where you're going.

TEND THE GARDEN

Spend a few quiet moments reflecting.

1. What repeated hurt, disappointment or pressure may have created that path?
2. Are you still emotionally pacing over something that happened in the past?
3. What might God be trying to plant in that area of your life today?

WATER THE SEED

Pay attention today to where your mind automatically goes when you're hurt, disappointed or worried. If you catch yourself replaying the same conversation or rehearsing the same offense, stop the emotional pacing. Pray, **"Holy Spirit, soften this ground. Show me Your way through this."** Then deliberately replace the old thought with something God says in His Word.

GROW THIS IN ME

Father,

You know every place in my heart that has been walked on. You know every disappointment, betrayal, loss and hurt that has put pressure on the ground. Show me where something that was once soft has become hard. Help me recognize the paths I continue to walk myself—the conversations I replay, the offenses I rehearse and the worries I keep pacing over. Holy Spirit, soften the ground again. Let Your Word penetrate the places I've tried to protect. Heal what has been hurt and teach me a new way to walk. And redeem the paths I've traveled. Use what You have brought me through to someday help someone else find their way toward You.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

**GOD PRODUCES THE FRUIT. WE CREATE THE CONDITIONS.
STAY CONNECTED TO THE VINE. STAY PLANTED. TRUST THE
PROCESS. THE FRUIT IS COMING.**

LOOKING AHEAD

Day Three – What's Beneath the Surface?

The path is about what has happened **to us**. The rocks take us somewhere more personal: what have we allowed to remain **in us**? Tomorrow we'll look beneath the surface at the things others may never see, but our roots keep running into.



More than Fruit

Day 3: What's Beneath the Surface?

TODAYS SCRIPTURE

Mark 4:5–6 (NIV) “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.”

Hebrews 12:15 (NIV) “See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”



TODAY'S SEED

A path wasn't always hard. At one time it was just like the ground around it. But people kept walking over the same place. Step after step, day after day, the pressure packed the soil tighter until eventually something that had once been soft became hard.

Jesus says some hearts can become like that. Sometimes life walks on us, someone leaves. Someone you trusted betrays you. Someone says something that cuts deeply. You pray and nothing seems to happen. You get disappointed, then disappointed again.

None of us goes through life without some traffic. The danger is that after enough traffic, **something soft can become hard**. We may even convince ourselves that hardness is strength. I'm never letting anyone get that close again. I'm not trusting like that again. I won't get my hopes up again. Hardness feels like protection. But there's a problem. The same hard ground that keeps something from getting out can keep God's Word from getting in.

And sometimes other people aren't the only ones walking on the path. We do it ourselves. We replay what happened.

Rehearse what they said. Imagine what we should have said. Worry about what might happen next. We emotionally pace back and forth over the same ground until we've worn a path into our own hearts.

Worry is often just emotional pacing. Jesus isn't pointing out the path to condemn us. He's showing us why the seed may not be penetrating certain areas of our lives. Maybe there are places where God keeps speaking, but hurt has made the ground hard. Here's the good news: **a path is still ground**. What became hard can become soft again.

And there's another beautiful possibility. Paths were made to take people somewhere. God can redeem the road you've traveled. The very place where you experienced hurt may someday become the path God uses you to walk with someone else toward healing. Your path may explain where you've been, but it doesn't get to determine where you're going.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

The Greek word Jesus uses for “**rocky places**” is **petrōdēs** (πετρώδης), meaning rocky or stony. The picture isn't simply a field with a few loose stones lying on top. It describes shallow soil with rock beneath it. The seed could germinate and produce visible growth, but its roots couldn't go deep enough to sustain it. **What was hidden underneath eventually affected what could survive above it**. Spiritual depth requires allowing God to deal with more than what everyone else can see.

DON'T MISS THIS

What you leave buried can eventually break what God is trying to grow.

TEND THE GARDEN

Spend a few quiet moments reflecting.

1. Is there an area of your life where you keep running into the same problem?
2. What happened **to you** that may have left something unhealthy **in you** ?
3. Is there bitterness, resentment, offense, pride or unforgiveness that you've allowed to remain beneath the surface?

WATER THE SEED

Ask the Holy Spirit one simple question today: **“Is there a rock I’ve allowed to remain in me?”** Don’t make a list, just identify one thing. If He brings something to mind, name it honestly before God and ask what your next step should be—repentance, forgiveness, releasing an offense or perhaps having a conversation. Whatever He shows you, don’t bury it again.

GROW THIS IN ME

Father,

You know everything that is beneath the surface of my life. Nothing is hidden from You, and still You love me completely. Give me the courage to let You go deeper. Show me anything I’ve allowed to remain in me that is keeping my roots from growing. Where hurt has become bitterness, help me release it. Where disappointment has become resentment, help me forgive. Where offense, envy or pride has taken hold, help me surrender it. I don’t want yesterday’s wounds breaking tomorrow’s opportunities. Dig deep in me. Remove what needs to be removed and give my roots room to grow. I want a life that isn’t just healthy on the surface, but deeply rooted in You.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

We can soften paths. We can dig out rocks. But the thorns take us all the way back to Genesis and something humanity could never fix on its own. Tomorrow we’ll follow the thorns from the curse of sin to a crown placed on the head of Jesus—and discover what He did with what we could never remove ourselves.

LOOKING AHEAD

Day Four – When You Can’t Fix the Ground

We can soften paths. We can dig out rocks. But the thorns take us all the way back to Genesis and something humanity could never fix on its own. Tomorrow we’ll follow the thorns from the curse of sin to a crown placed on the head of Jesus—and discover what He did with what we could never remove ourselves.



Day 4: When You Can't Fix the Ground

TODAYS SCRIPTURE

Genesis 3:17–18 (NIV) “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you.”

Galatians 3:13–14 (NKJV) “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us... that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus.”

TODAY'S SEED

There's something different about the thorns. We've talked about the path—what others have done **to me** . We've talked about the rocks—what I've allowed to remain **in me** . But when we follow the thorns through Scripture, they take us somewhere much deeper. They take us all the way back to Genesis. Thorns weren't part of God's original design. They show up after sin enters the world. God tells Adam that because of sin, the ground will now produce “**thorns and thistles**.”

The thorns are a picture of **what sin has done to us**. Sin brought into God's creation things He never intended: shame, brokenness, separation and death. And unlike a rock we can dig out or a hard place that can be softened, we eventually reach something we simply can't fix ourselves.

That's why the gospel is such good news. We couldn't deal with the curse, so Jesus did. Think about what happened before the cross. Roman soldiers beat Jesus, mocked Him, put a scarlet robe around Him and then twisted together a **crown of thorns** and pressed it onto His head. Thorns. The very thing Genesis connects to the curse is placed on the head of Jesus. That isn't a detail we should hurry past.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

Paul says Christ “**redeemed**” us from the curse. The Greek word is **exagorazō** (ἐξαγοράζω) , meaning to buy out, redeem or purchase out of. It was used for purchasing something out of the marketplace. Paul's picture isn't Jesus helping us cope with the curse; it is Christ **buying us out from under it**. The curse came through sin, but redemption came through Christ. We couldn't work our way out, so Jesus paid the price to bring us out.



Paul says, “**Christ has redeemed us from the curse**.” Jesus took upon Himself what sin had produced. Paul says elsewhere that God made Him who knew no sin “to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Jesus took the sin and left the blessing. That changes the meaning of dirty work. Dirty work doesn't mean **fix yourself** . It doesn't mean try harder, become more religious or somehow make yourself worthy enough for God. There is work only Jesus could do—and He did it.

The path may need softening. The rocks may need removing. But when we reach the thorns, we are reminded that everything God grows in us ultimately rests on something we could never accomplish for ourselves. **Jesus bore the thorns**.

DON'T MISS THIS

Jesus took the sin, bore the thorns, and left us the blessing.

TEND THE GARDEN

Spend a few quiet moments reflecting.

1. Where are you still trying to fix yourself instead of trusting what Jesus has already done?
2. Is there guilt or shame you continue carrying even though you've brought it to Christ?
3. Why is it sometimes easier to "try harder" than simply receive grace?
- 4.

WATER THE SEED

Take a few minutes today and picture the crown of thorns. Then slowly read **Galatians 3:13–14** again. When you come to the words "Christ has redeemed us," make them personal: **"Christ has redeemed me."** Thank Jesus specifically for something you've been trying to carry, fix or earn that He has already dealt with at the cross.

GROW THIS IN ME

Father,

Thank You that You never asked me to save myself. Thank You for Jesus, who stepped into the brokenness sin created and carried what I could never carry. Thank You that He took my sin, bore the curse and wore the thorns. Forgive me for the times I've turned spiritual growth into trying harder, doing better or attempting to earn what Jesus has already provided. Teach me to live from grace. When shame tells me I'm still condemned, remind me that I've been redeemed. When I'm tempted to trust my own effort, turn my attention back to the cross. Jesus, thank You for taking the sin and leaving me the blessing. Let everything You grow in me flow from what You have already done for me.

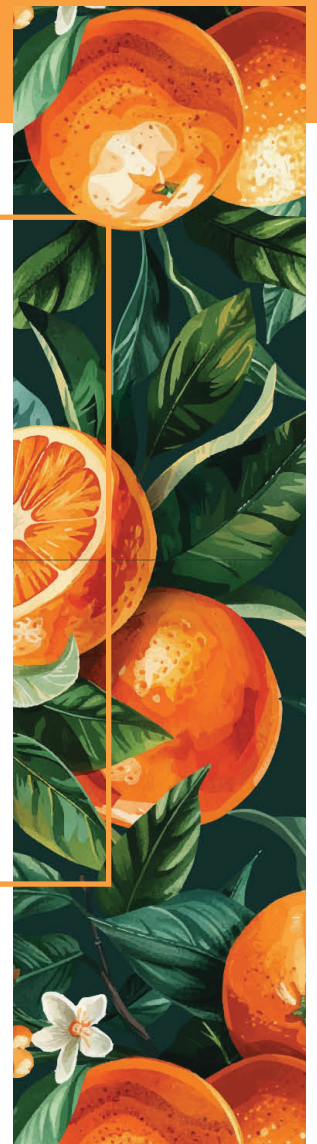
In Jesus' name, Amen.

**GOD PRODUCES THE FRUIT. WE CREATE THE CONDITIONS.
STAY CONNECTED TO THE VINE. STAY PLANTED. TRUST THE
PROCESS. THE FRUIT IS COMING.**

LOOKING AHEAD

Day Five – Planting Tomorrow's Harvest

We've spent this week working on the ground. But healthy ground isn't the finish line—it's preparation for what comes next. Tomorrow we'll turn our attention from the ground beneath us to the seed in our hands. We're enjoying fruit today because somebody planted yesterday. Now it's our turn to plant for people and harvests we may not see yet.



More than Fruit

Day 5: Planting Tomorrow's Harvest

TODAYS SCRIPTURE

Psalm 126:5–6 (NKJV) “Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”

Matthew 13:31–32 (NIV) “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree.”



TODAY'S SEED

We love harvests, harvests are visible, and they give us something to celebrate. You can point to the fruit and say, Look what God has done. But every harvest has a history. Before there was fruit, there was seed. Before there was something impressive to see, somebody did something that probably didn't look impressive at all. They planted.

Psalm 126 captures both sides beautifully. The people are celebrating what God has done: **“The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad.”** They're standing in a harvest that once seemed impossible. But the Psalm doesn't end with celebration. It goes right back to sowing. “Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy.” In their world, seed wasn't a hobby, it was survival. What you held in your hand could become food today or harvest tomorrow. Planting meant releasing something valuable with no guarantee of what would happen next. That's faith.

We're enjoying things today because somebody planted before us. Somebody prayed. Somebody gave. Somebody

taught a child. Somebody invited a friend. Somebody encouraged a hurting person. Somebody believed God when there wasn't much evidence that anything was happening.

Now it's our turn. Jesus said the Kingdom is like a mustard seed. It starts small, but small doesn't mean insignificant. A conversation, prayer, or invitation. An hour spent serving. A lesson taught to a child. An act of generosity. None of those things looks like a harvest, they look like seeds.

There are people who will someday experience the fruit of something you're planting right now. You may not know their names. You may never see everything your seed becomes. Plant anyway. We've spent this week talking about preparing the ground. But we don't prepare ground just to have nice dirt.

We prepare it because there's a harvest worth planting for.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

The Hebrew word translated **“sow”** in Psalm 126 is **zāra' (זָרַע)**, meaning to sow, scatter seed, or plant for future growth. Sowing is an act aimed at a future you cannot yet see. The Psalm connects sowing and reaping, but it places time between them. That's the nature of seed. **Faith is willing to put something into the ground today because it trusts God with what can grow tomorrow.**

DON'T MISS THIS

God often hides something large inside something small.

TEND THE GARDEN

Spend a few quiet moments reflecting.

1. What fruit are you enjoying today because someone else was willing to plant before you?
2. What small seed has God already placed in your hand?
3. Is there something you've hesitated to do because it didn't seem significant enough?

WATER THE SEED

Plant one seed today. Have the conversation. Pray the prayer. Make the invitation. Send the encouragement. Serve someone. Give something. Invest in a child or encourage a leader. Don't worry about making it big—**just put the seed in the ground and trust God with the harvest.**

GROW THIS IN ME

Father,

Thank You for every harvest I'm enjoying because someone was willing to plant before me. Thank You for the people who prayed, served, gave, taught, encouraged and believed when they couldn't yet see what their seed would become. Now make me a sower. Open my eyes to the people in my world and the seeds You have already placed in my hand. Keep me from overlooking small opportunities because they don't seem significant enough. Give me faith to plant when I cannot see the harvest. Use my conversations, prayers, generosity, service and encouragement as seeds in someone else's future. The fruit of yesterday contains the seed for tomorrow. Help me faithfully plant what You've placed in my hand and trust You with what comes out of the ground.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

**GOD PRODUCES THE FRUIT. WE CREATE THE CONDITIONS.
STAY CONNECTED TO THE VINE. STAY PLANTED. TRUST THE
PROCESS. THE FRUIT IS COMING.**

LOOKING AHEAD

Next Sunday

MORE THAN FRUIT — Part Four: From Here to There

This week we've worked on the ground and discovered that what God has planted in us was never intended to stop with us. Next Sunday we turn our attention outward. There is a world beyond where we are now—people to reach, lives to touch, families to serve and seeds still waiting to be planted.

