THE ANALOGY OF AGRICULTURE

Though our society is consumed with technology, convenience, automation, and digitalization, there is a sense of hi-tech fatigue that has begun to encroach on our fascination with it. Upcoming generations seem to be opting for smaller houses, a back-to-nature philosophy, organic and healthy eating, all amid rising environmental concerns. Though we may be a bit removed from the agrarian stages of civilization, we still need to eat and need agriculture to survive. It is amazing that Christ utilized illustrations that are so fundamental to any human experience that they will never be antiquated. Even urban disciples have to eat and are at least acquainted with the basic concepts of agriculture. As one of His teaching methods, Christ used these every day familiar activities to illustrate larger spiritual truths.

While the parable itself has many principles to mine in the context of Luke 8, the next five weeks take a look at the process of discipleship through the illustration of agriculture. Also known as the Grow Cycle, the course of soul-winning, discipleship, and evangelism is likened to the activity of growing food and fruit. The stages of the cycle consist of preparing the soil, planting the seed, cultivating the plant, harvesting the yield, and preserving the fruit.

This week hones into the stage of soil preparation. Even before the harvest and the planting of seeds, there is a crucial preparation work to be done that ensures a healthy growth process and bountiful harvest for the disciple. “As the garden must be prepared for the natural seed, so the heart must be prepared for the seed of truth” (Adventist Home, p. 145).
Write out Luke 8:5–15 from the translation of your choice. You may also re-write the passage in your own words, outline, or mind-map the chapter.
SOIL PREPARATION

Jesus’ Parable of the Sower recognizes some fundamental concepts of discipleship. In Luke 8:5, “a sower went out to sow his seed.” The actual planting of seeds will be looked at next week, but we first observe that the different types of soils are associated with the conditions of the heart. If the seed is the Word of God according to Luke 8:11, the four types of soil are then four types of human hearts, which receive the Word of God in different ways. Before even sowing seeds, Christ’s disciples then have a pre-work to do in preparing hearts for the most ideal results.

The discipleship stage of preparation involves coming close to people in friendship and service, showing that we care. This true human interaction with genuine love and authenticity provide the foundation for trust in the relationship. Too often this stage is bypassed in the disciples’ zeal and trust is never established. Frequently, church members give Bible studies and hold large evangelistic campaigns while they do not simply get to know and care for those in the community.

As individual disciples, we can prepare the soil of those around us by acts of loving kindness, by “paying it forward” (a movement where random good deeds are done and repeated causing a chain reaction), and by even smiling (in the right context) and being nice to people! This stage calls each disciple to embrace the role of compassion, sympathy, and empathy towards all those around us. This requires creativity, intentionality, and enthusiasm!

Preparation is also where our efforts for public relations and social services take place. In the Adventist faith, the role of health and the medical work are crucial and assist in soil preparation. Ellen White stated, “when properly conducted, the health work is an entering wedge, making a way for other truths to reach the heart” (Testimonies for the Church, 6:327). Notice that this work is not the full system of evangelism and witnessing, but it prepares hearts for further efforts.

Is this work insincere? No. It would be if we did not actually care or if we expected something back. It is merely a call to be comprehensive in our Christian witness and discipleship. “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me!’” (The Ministry of Healing, p. 143). Not requiring anything in return for helping others does not mean we should avoid sharing the gospel. Salvation is still every person’s greatest need!

Memorize your favorite verse in Luke 8:5–15. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

What are intentional ways you can manifest the preparation stage of soil in your discipleship?
While individuals can do much in preparing the soil, the united work of the corporate body of Christ also avails much. Churches should be active in church-wide community ministries to minister to the needs of the people in their local territory. Church-wide means more than a few people running a community service center or a handful of people holding a cooking school. It means determining the needs of a community and engaging the entire church in community outreach. Here are some practical ways to get involved:

1. ELECT a Community Services leader and Health Ministries leader to direct the church’s need-based ministries; if there isn’t one, volunteer!
2. SCHEDULE regular health ministry events (health expos, cooking schools, monthly supper clubs, free clinics, etc.).
3. DISCOVER other local community needs, which may involve contacting civic leaders (mayor, police chief, fire chief, etc.).
4. CONDUCT projects to bless your community and build personal and digital relationships for further ministry.
5. INVOLVE every member in some way—health ministries, community service projects, humanitarian ministries, felt-need ministries, finance seminars, online presence, etc.
6. PROVIDE leadership support—promotion, financial support, and participation.
7. PRAY for laborers and for the salvation of souls through community need-based ministries.

For more information on preparation and the Grow cycle, visit https://grow.adventist.org/prepare/.
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Acts 10:38  
Luke 10:5–9  
James 2:14–17  
Isaiah 58:6–10

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with discipleship and people?

IN GOD WE TRUST

At the core of the preparation stage is the heart of Christ to develop trust within the relationship. Christ’s ministry was all about connecting with people who were receptive to His message and mission. Not only did He converse with tax collectors (who society hated), lepers (who society shunned), and sinners (who society rejected), Jesus ate with them—which, in the Middle Eastern context denotes a deeper relationship.

To eat with individuals and to heal them as Christ did is an opportunity for His disciples to hear their story as well as share their story. In His interactions, Jesus listened intently to their words and the emotions of their hearts. From this, He parsed out their needs and disbursed His grace to meet these needs in practical ways. Whether or not we can heal supernaturally as Christ did, we can certainly serve our communities by meeting physical, emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual needs. In the end, when the trust was established, Christ pointed humanity to God.

Opportunities will avail themselves to share God’s story of love, freedom, healing, and hope for all those who seek it. Opportunities will be opened to share how God provided love, freedom, healing, and hope for us. Regardless of what happens in the course of our relationships with those we seek to introduce to Christ, the starting point is the establishment of trust. May we find ourselves mimicking our Lord in developing trust in all of our relationships, whether they be in the home, church, work, school, or community.
PREPARATION OF THE SOIL

Throughout the parable of the sower, Christ represents the different results of the sowing as depending upon the soil. In every case the sower and the seed are the same. Thus He teaches that if the word of God fails of accomplishing its work in our hearts and lives, the reason is to be found in ourselves. But the result is not beyond our control. True, we cannot change ourselves; but the power of choice is ours, and it rests with us to determine what we will become. The wayside, the stony-ground, the thorny-ground hearers need not remain such. The Spirit of God is ever seeking to break the spell of infatuation that holds men absorbed in worldly things, and to awaken a desire for the imperishable treasure. It is by resisting the Spirit that men become inattentive to or neglectful of God’s word. They are themselves responsible for the hardness of heart that prevents the good seed from taking root, and for the evil growths that check its development.

The garden of the heart must be cultivated. The soil must be broken up by deep repentance for sin. Poisonous, Satanic plants must be uprooted. The soil once overgrown by thorns can be reclaimed only by diligent labor. So the evil tendencies of the natural heart can be overcome only by earnest effort in the name and strength of Jesus. The Lord bids us by His prophet, “Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.” “Sow to yourselves in righteousness; reap in mercy.” Jer. 4:3; Hosea 10:12. This work He desires to accomplish for us, and He asks us to co-operate with Him.

The sowers of the seed have a work to do in preparing hearts to receive the gospel. In the ministry of the word there is too much sermonizing, and too little of real heart-to-heart work. There is need of personal labor for the souls of the lost. In Christlike sympathy we should come close to men individually, and seek to awaken their interest in the great things of eternal life. Their hearts may be as hard as the beaten highway, and apparently it may be a useless effort to present the Saviour to them; but while logic may fail to move, and argument be powerless to convince, the love of Christ, revealed in personal ministry, may soften the stony heart, so that the seed of truth can take root.

So the sowers have something to do that the seed may not be choked with thorns or perish because of shallowness of soil. At the very outset of the Christian life every believer should be taught its foundation principles. He should be taught that he is not merely to be saved by Christ’s sacrifice, but that he is to make the life of Christ his life and the character of Christ his character. Let all be taught that they are to bear burdens and to deny natural inclination. Let them learn the blessedness of working for Christ, following Him in self-denial, and enduring hardness as good soldiers. Let them learn to trust His love and to cast on Him their cares. Let them taste the joy of winning souls for Him. In their love and interest for the lost, they will lose sight of self. The pleasures of the world will lose their power to attract and its burdens to dishearten. The plowshare of truth will do its work. It will break up the fallow ground. It will not merely cut off the tops of the thorns, but will take them out by the roots.

(Christ Object Lessons, p. 56-58)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

What do you know about soil preparation off the top of your head?

Outside of agriculture, why is preparation important regardless of endeavor?

What happens when preparation is not done in our evangelistic activity? How have you experienced this?

What are some acts of kindness that you have done to reflect Christ?

How can this stage become inauthentic? How can this stage become authentic?

How can your local church’s community service ministry be taken to the next level?

Who would be equivalents today of society’s hated, shunned, and rejected? How can they be reached today?