

## **“Tilling The Soil Of The Heart”** **- Ron Stullenbarger -**

This week we are going to begin looking at a vital spiritual practice to all those seeking to grow in God: *tilling the soil of the heart*. Jesus spoke in Matthew 13 of two different types of soil — hard and soft. God longs for us to till the soil of our hearts that we might be receptive to the seed of His word and bear fruit. May our hearts become more responsive to the presence, will, and love of God as we cultivate good soil with the help of the Holy Spirit.

**Thankfulness** is one of the most powerful tools in making our hearts both soft to the seed of God’s word and filled with abundant joy. Thanksgiving aligns our thoughts and emotions with the reality of God’s goodness in a world wrought with lies about the character of God. It breeds joy and trust rather than entitlement and negativity. With each declaration of thankfulness we dig a shovel into the hard, rocky soil of our heart and stir it up until it becomes receptive to the fullness of God and filled with the fruit of the Spirit.

The Bible is filled with commands to be thankful. Ephesians 5:20 tells us to be *“giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Philippians 4:6 tells us, *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”* But my favorite command on thankfulness is Psalm 107:1, *“Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!”*

You see, it’s important to understand that the Bible doesn’t suggest that we give thanks, but rather commands us to always be thankful. And in God’s command He reveals His heart. We learn in Psalm 107 that our thankfulness is meant to be a response to the steadfast love of our heavenly Father. Thankfulness is meant to be the overflow of remembering, encountering and mulling over how our God is abundantly faithful and filled with unconditional love for us.

I used to read Scripture commanding me to be thankful and think, *“Sorry God, I know I need to be more thankful. I know I’m so provided for and loved. I’m sorry for not thanking you more.”* But after meditating on Psalm 107:1, I realized that my lack of thankfulness is a symptom of not spending enough time encountering God’s wonderful character rather than a core issue in and of itself. Tilling the soil of my heart through thankfulness requires that I set aside time to simply experience God’s goodness and love. Because everything He does is by grace, my natural response to His character will always be one of thanksgiving.

Take time to reflect on the faithful and loving character of your heavenly Father. Allow His goodness to cause thankfulness to well up within you. May your time in prayer be filled with a transformational encounter with God and cultivate good soil that bears the fruit of an abundant life.