

THE BIG IDEA: Where we put our roots will help determine our fruit.

The Take-Off

This morning will be the final week of our “We are Family” series, and we’ve got quite the challenge ahead of us! In order to finish it well, I need you to be able to

Let me be clear about what will happen and what won’t happen this morning.

You will leave with a better understanding of who we are as a church: what we value, what we do, why we do what we do the way we do it.

You won’t leave with every question you have answered. That’s not possible, and I haven’t prepared with that in mind. But I have prayed that you would feel clearly the leading of the Holy Spirit about where to be planted.

You’ll remember from last week that being planted is how we refer to membership here at The Gathering, and more than being some clever new way to say membership, it’s a concept firmly rooted (pardon the pun) in Scripture.

God wants us all to be planted because He wants all of us to grow.

This morning, we’ll ask 2 more questions: does where we plant matter, and what kind of soil will you find at The Gathering?

First, does the soil even matter? For the answer, turn to Matthew 13 and let’s start in verse 1.

1. Location, location, location

- a. In one simple parable, Jesus placed incredible importance on WHERE things are planted.
- b. He described a farmer throwing out seed that lands in 1 of 4 places:
 - hard soil
 - rocky soil
 - thorny soil
 - good soil
- c. Notice that the ONLY variable in this parable is the soil
- d. The farmer is the same, the method is the same, the seed is the same, even the birds are the same
- e. What’s planted is important, yes, but WHERE it’s planted is the one deciding factor between growth and death.
- f. “Fine, Paul. Then I’ll just plant myself in front of the TV and let that TV preacher grow me!”
- g. I’m with you! The introvert in me would love nothing more than that! No bad sermons, the best music, no people to get in your way of connecting with God.
- h. Of course, then we’d have to cut out about 145 verses in our Bibles. These are the verses that contain the 59 “one another” commands.
- i. You know, love one another (John 13:35). Honor one another (Romans 12:10). Accept one another (Romans 15:7). Greet one another (Romans 16:16). Wait for one another (1 Corinthians 11:33). Serve one another (Galatians 5:13). Forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32).
- j. These commands are relational, and they can’t be fully obeyed apart from relationships!
- k. In fact, it is the friction of these commands in the context of relationships that makes us better. Proverbs 27:17 says that iron sharpens iron.
- l. In fact, if we only hang with people we like, Jesus said our love is worthless (Luke 6:32-36) (NO CREDIT!!)
- m. Do you see now why the best soil for lasting spiritual growth is the local family of God - the local church?
- n. Every church - all 150+ of ‘em in this county - has soil, and for the rest of our time, I want to help you discover the soil that makes us who we are at The Gathering so that you can decide if this is the soil for you.

2. Why we do what we do the way we do it

- a. Our mission at The Gathering is to live near God in order to be sent to those far from Him. In 6 words, it’s to be near God, near man, making disciplers. In one word, it’s near.
- b. Now, I know it should be Jesus, but Jesus is the perfect example of near, isn’t He? God could have shouted at us from a distance about how we needed Him, but He chose to send Jesus into our world to get near us so that we could be near Him.
- c. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5 that Jesus reconciled us to God and gave us the same call.
- d. We are reconcilers, and the soil of The Gathering is all about helping people who are distant from God find the peace of being reconciled to Him.

- e. Again, in a word, we want to be near, and to do that we must be defined by 4 qualities:
- we are **NECESSARY**
 - we don't want to be a church that isn't seen as necessary in our city
 - we don't want to grow Christians who are separate from the people who need Jesus
 - the last thing we want is to have members who would not be missed by their neighbors or be a church which would not be missed by our city
 - There are 3 things that we believe are necessary if we're going to be necessary:
 - 1) The Gospel
 - John 3:14 says that Jesus **MUST** be lifted up
 - This is about the cross
 - Programs, activities, helping others will never be enough without the gospel
 - Romans 3:10 and 3:23 are clear: we are sinners in need of a savior, and when you bring people with you to our church, you can be assured they will hear the gospel of Jesus
 - 2) The Bible
 - Hebrews 4:12 says the Bible is living and active, that it can cut us like nothing else can
 - Isaiah 55:11 tells us that God's word will always accomplish what He desires in us
 - 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17 says that the #1 tool for growing believers is the Bible, and that means we teach all of it - even the parts we don't like
 - 3) The Power of the Holy Spirit
 - Jesus thought the Holy Spirit was so important that He actually said it was good for us if He went away so that we could have the Holy Spirit
 - This is such a big deal to us that we are kicking off 2015 with a series called "The Helper" that will help us understand the role He plays
 - We are an Assembly of God church, and 2 reasons why are because their soil is mission and they allow each A/G church to work out the way we do church
 - The denomination started as a mission agency to send people to the ends of the earth
 - If we're going to be necessary, we **HAVE** to have the power of the Holy Spirit promised to us
 - Acts 1:8 - He is a sending power
 - we are **EQUIPPING**
 - we are a teaching church, and that doesn't just mean sermons, but helping members learn
 - Ephesians 4:11-13 reveals the job of the leaders is to equip - to make ready - the family for the mission
 - There's a lot of gray in the Bible about how we can do that, and I think God allows churches to work that out in a way that is best for their culture
 - Here, we believe strongly that an elder-led church fleshes out that mandate to equip the best
 - In numerous places in Acts and the NT, we find churches led by elders
 - Not by one man, and not by congregations that vote on everything
 - But when elders pray and examine others who may be set apart by God to lead and then the church has the opportunity to voice concerns or praise, we end up with a strong spiritual leadership that isn't in place to **DO** everything, but rather to equip everyone to do something
 - Elders equip you which gives you the confidence to serve others
 - we are **AUTHENTIC**
 - The world we're reaching can smell fake a mile away, and so we value authenticity
 - Do you have to be perfect to join here? No. But you've got to be open to pursuing realness.
 - So elders may have conversations with you about things we see in your life.
 - Being planted means you won't run away if we say something that you don't like. It means we have conversations instead of arguments. It means you can tell us that we aren't equipping you and we won't get mad at you.
 - The 2 ways we grow authentic? Being in community and being in service.
 - Community is just a fancy word for friction, right? If 2 people are in a room, there's the possibility of friction, but 1 Peter 1:6-7 says that is what makes our faith like gold!
 - Hebrews 10:24 says we are to "spur" one another on to love and good deeds. "Spur" means "to irritate." Ouch!
 - Not that Community Groups are awful - far from it! But they are an intentional choice to let others in, and sometimes that can be hard, especially for introverts like me!

- Serving makes our faith real, too.
- We can say we love people, but those people believe it when we serve them.
- James 1:14-17 warns us that without works our faith lacks credibility.
- That's why serving is such a big deal here.
- When I serve the children, my faith grows more real. When I open a door and greet guests with a smile, they believe what goes on in the service may be more real than they thought!
- We're never more like Jesus than when we serve
- we are **RELATIONAL**
 - That leads us to the last quality - we are relational
 - I freely admit that we live in a Christian culture that encourages us to attend a handful of churches but never belong to any, and that short-circuits what Jesus wants to do in us
 - It can be so easy to lone-ranger the faith, but when we aren't around people with real faith, we often find ourselves wondering if our faith is real.
 - Everything we've talked about happens in relationship, and it's a covenantal one, not a contractual one
 - A contract says I'll greet you if you greet me. If you preach better, I'll give more.
 - But a covenant says I'll greet you even if you don't greet me. My faithfulness in giving to God will not change because of how you preach.
 - Covenants are what make weddings so special. "No matter what, I am yours."
 - It makes churches special, too. Paul prayed in Ephesians 3:17-21 an amazing prayer for believers, and it all started with being rooted and established (planted) in love (the soil makes the difference).
 - We want you to be planted here, in the redemptive, relational soil of The Gathering, and we want to close this morning by offering you the opportunity to do just that.

The Landing

Where we put our roots will help determine our fruit. When you plant here, in this soil, we are covenantally committed to your growth and fruitfulness!

I want to close this morning by reading the Covenant we ask planted members to sign, and then give you the chance to sign it.

We love that you're here, and we can't wait to watch you grow!