

2026 06 21/ Hosea 10:12, Luke 18:9-14
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Softening of the Ground

Thirty years ago, my mother had been diagnosed with stage four cancer. With all the questions of my life and in front of my mother's death, I wanted to know whether God really was existing. I was desperate in prayer. And God showed up in the middle of the day of the springtime. When I was thinking of the creation story, God's power came down into my room from Heaven. God's voice said, **"This power of creation doesn't harm you but surrounds you with love."** And **"Read Isaiah."**

It was the moment my life changed forever and something profound happened to me. My deep soul rejoiced, which I couldn't understand what was happening through my brain. It was the first moment that I met the beautiful and holy presence of God. The light of holiness illumined the deepest part of my soul. I was able to see myself through the lens of God. Great joy and the truth of my being revealed! What a great sinner! What a liar! How arrogant I was! I was able to see who truly I am. After that moment, I sat down and started writing cards apologizing for all the wrongdoings of the past, saying, "I am sorry for the things done wrong." Humility visited me for the first time in my life. And freedom was there; the lightness of life was there. I couldn't go back to the dark life.

This morning, in our series *Waiting for the Rain*, we are continuing to ask a very important question together: Is the ground of our hearts ready to receive the rain that God wants to pour out, the promise of God for our church?

Last week, we talked about corporate prayer as a church. I feel we are starting to be aware of the need for prayer. Today I want to go one level deeper. I want to talk about the condition of the soil itself. What does it take to soften a heart that has grown hard? I believe the answer is two things: humility and turning. And I want to show you what they look like.

Fallow Ground and the Farmer's Urgency

The prophet Hosea was speaking to a nation that had grown spiritually hard. Israel had not abandoned faith — they were still going to the temple, still performing the rituals. But their hearts had quietly drifted. Comfort had replaced hunger. Worshipping God became only a ritual. They were going through the motions while the ground beneath them had slowly, almost imperceptibly, become something the rain could no longer penetrate. And into that moment, God speaks through Hosea with a word that is both urgent and tender. Hosea 10:12, "Sow righteousness for yourselves, reap the fruit of steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you."

Break up your fallow ground.

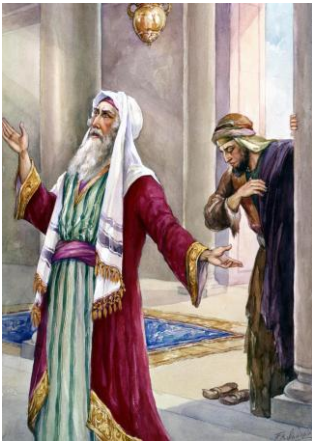


Fallow ground means soil that has not been plowed. It is hardened ground. Weeds take root in the cracks. When rain finally comes, the water does not soak in — it runs off the top, wasted. It still has the potential to grow something remarkable. But in its current condition, it cannot receive the rain.

Many of us love God sincerely. I know and see that. But here is a gentle and honest question: did love and faithfulness, over time, lose the first love like the Church in Ephesus in the Book of Revelation?

Did the presence of the amazing God become familiar in a way that no longer surprises us? God, the faithful farmer, is looking at the ground of our hearts and saying: Break it up. It is time. Hosea said, “It is time to seek the Lord. Now. The season is here, and the ground must be made ready.”

So, what breaks up fallow ground in the spiritual life? In my case, truly coming closer to God through the urgency of my life. It brought me humility and confession. But you don’t need to wait until something urgent happens. As James said, “If you come closer to God, God comes closer to you.” These are the plows. These are what the Spirit uses to turn over the ground of our hearts that has grown comfortable and defended. Let us look at what they actually mean.



Two Men, One Temple, One Mirror

Jesus told a parable in Luke 18. You may know it well. He said it was for those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt.

Two men go up to the temple to pray. The first man is a Pharisee. This man was not a bad person at all as we imagine. Listen! He fasted weekly twice. We do not fast one meal at all. He is far better than us. He tithed. It is not a small thing. Only 5-10% of Christians tithe. He kept the law meticulously. In his community, he was a respected, admired, looked-up-to person. He was doing everything — and doing it consistently. If any one of us lives like him, we would respect him highly as a very faithful person. Outside, nothing lacks in his faith life. Don’t we judge others from outside? It could be very wrong. And listen to his prayer, “I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I’m certainly not like that tax collector!” (Luke 18:11-12)

How does this prayer sound? He is praying — but he is really talking about himself. He has come to the temple, but he has not actually come to God. What does this prayer mean? When you give effort to follow the religious rules legalistically, your SELF works there, which causes pride in yourself. Pride is an enemy of God. And toward others? Judgement. Pride of self and judgment toward others go together. Pride blinded him. There is no place of humility.

The tax collector; a collaborator with the Roman occupation. He was despised. But listen to what he does in the temple. He will not even lift his eyes toward heaven. He beats his chest — a gesture of deep grief and self-reproach in that culture and he says: “O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.” (Luke 18:13) He knew who he was, where he is. It is humility. It means you know who you are. And Jesus says, this man, not the Pharisee, went home justified. When you ask you a question, who do you resemble more?

Before God, our souls are like a dark room. When we open the curtain and let the sunlight shine into the room, what do we see? We see a room filled with millions of floating dust in the air. It is our human condition before God. Are we genuinely aware that we need mercy every single time we stand before God?

I want to say that humility is one of the most difficult postures a human being can sustain. Not because we are uniquely bad people. But because pride is so natural and deep in us, and so subtle, that we often cannot see it in ourselves. The Pharisee had no idea. He genuinely believed he was honoring God with his prayer. That is how quietly spiritual pride works — it disguises itself as faithfulness.

True humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less. It is arriving before God with open hands, no agenda, nothing to prove. It is like the way a patient enters a hospital. Not to impress the doctor with how healthy they look. But because they know they need help. The tax collector's posture was

the posture of softened ground. No crust of self-protection. No hardened surface of comparison. Just open, broken, honest soil. And that is the only kind of ground that receives the rain.

When you see truly who you are by the light of God, the only way to handle it is to turn to God. Genuine sorrow matters. Honesty matters. However, we don't need to dwell on the past failure. It is liberating. And we change our direction toward God. God is holding our hands for our further journey. God, like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, is already running down the road to meet us before we have finished forming the words. (Luke 15:11-32) This is how we get the ground ready.

Breaking the Ground Together

Before we close this morning, I want us to actually do it together, right now the way the tax collector did it in the temple. I want to invite you to three simple movements. And if you are comfortable, I invite you to bow your head, close your eyes, and just let this be real.

The first thing is honesty. Ask yourself, **“Is there something in me that has hardened? A wound I have been protecting for a long time? A pride I have not named? A relationship that needs a card, a call, an honest word?”** You do not have to have perfect words. Just be honest with God right now. And say it simply. “God, be merciful to me. God, I have been holding onto this. God, I am sorry.” Simple. Sincere. When you have named it, do not stay there. Receive the grace that has already been extended to you in Jesus Christ. Let's take a moment together right now.

[Pause for 1 to 2 minutes of quiet, personal prayer]

Lord, we come like the tax collector this morning. Humbly we request your mercy. Soften our ground, Lord. Break up what has become hard and resistant. Make us ready for the rain. In Jesus' name, amen.