

# High Risk Sower

If you have ever looked after somebody in your life, whether it's your child, your parent or your spouse, you know how hard it is to take care of life; it takes time, energy, love, patience and endurance. Even if you look after your dog, cat or your garden, it takes almost the same care. But we keep doing it, because we know that every life needs love and care, and we know that it's worthwhile.

When I was in my twenties, like most Korean men, I served my military duty. When I was in the military, I was ordered to manage a greenhouse by an army officer. First I collected seeds from flowers according to their colors: red, white, pink, yellow – as many colours as I could find. And then, I planted the flower seeds carefully in a garden bed. My army officer threatened me by saying, “if the flower seeds don't sprout, I will plant *you* in a garden, head first.” I was scared, because he was my commanding officer, and I had already seen his powerful Taekwondo skills. I had to follow his orders, because that was my job. So I fed the flower seeds with water, sunshine, wind, and most of all, with love every day. Even in church, I prayed for them every night. I really took care of them with my whole concern. Gardening became my everyday activity in the military, and the seeds became my children. It was not long before the tender green shoots rose above the ground. Hallelujah! I praised the Lord. Then, I raised various kinds of flowers and planted them around our military base. I was so happy, not just because I didn't have to be planted, but because my flowers made my military base beautiful. Through that experience, I learned the mystery of life; life has its own power, but it needs a caregiver to grow. No one can grow by their own power alone. Everyone needs a caregiver. Even a single flower or a weed can't grow without any other help such as soil, sunshine, wind and water. When you walk on a trail, you see various plants, birds and bugs, and you may think that they grow by themselves. But the truth is that everything – soil, sunshine, wind, plants, birds and bugs - is a caregiver to each other.

In today's text, we meet another caregiver, a singular and peculiar one. Usually a farmer knows whether the soil is good or not, whether it is ready for sowing or not. He cultivates the soil first; he ploughs, loosens and fertilizes the soil. Then he carefully sows seeds in the soil, only in the good soil. Seeds are precious, and

sometimes expensive; it would be foolish to waste resources in places where there would only be a poor return. Quite apart from best agricultural practices, *this* sower throws seeds on a well-worn path where birds can eat them, on rocky ground where it is unlikely that they will grow, and among thorns that will choke them. It seems obvious that the sower in this text is anything but a good businessperson. He seems willing to just fling seeds everywhere. Why does he do this? Maybe he does so in order to remind us that the gospel might be bigger than good business principles, he has other priorities than just good soil. Certainly, this parable is not so much about good soil as it is about a good sower. But do we really think that this is a good sower? Maybe we would cringe at the waste of resources. This sower is not cautious and strategic enough to throw the seed in only those places where the chances for growth are best; he throws seed not only on good soil, but also amid the rocky and barren places and eventually everywhere; he doesn't differentiate between the good soil and the bad soil. This is a high-risk sower, relentless in indiscriminately throwing seed on all soil – as if it were all potentially good soil. That is what the Bible calls a good sower.

How many times have you been disappointed with yourself, when you did not achieve your goal or your life seemed fruitless? How many times have you been disappointed with a person or a group when they fell short of your expectations in spite of your effort and hard work? How many times have you felt helpless when things around you don't get better and nothing seems to change? When something happens to us, we easily jump to conclusions; 'Oh this is bad', 'this is not good, 'this is not bad', or 'this is good'. But the truth is that we never know what is going to happen next, or whether it is one hundred percent bad or good. Our circumstance, situation and condition can always change. Sometimes we are like a well-worn path, rocky ground, a tangle of thorns and sometimes we are like good soil; it all depends, so they don't determine who we really are. But there is one thing that is invariable and unchangeable in us; that is God's seed in us.

Meister Eckhart, one of my favourite theologians, whose teaching had a strong influence on the thinkers of the Reformation, including Martin Luther, spoke about the seed of God. He said, "The seed of God is in us. Given an intelligent and hard-working farmer, it will thrive and grow up to God, whose seed it is; and accordingly its fruits will be God-nature. Pear seeds grow into pear trees, nut seeds into nut trees, and God-seed into God.

In the parable of the good sower, God is not like a mighty, powerful king who judges and punishes, but is like a labourer or a farmer who works tirelessly, sowing seeds everywhere no matter what the circumstances. That is the work of love and grace. Like the good sower, our job is not to judge others by how rocky or thorny they may seem, but work together with the good sower, growing the seeds. Because there is no border for the good sower to plant seeds, there is no border for us to grow and look after the seeds in others no matter who they are.

Our Sunday school is one of the places where God's seed is planted and growing in our church. Recently, I met a woman who was baptized in our church when she was young, and grew up in our Sunday school. She has been teaching in a public school for many years. She said to me, what she learned from our Sunday school is the foundation of what she teaches to her students in every day of her life. The seeds that God gave her, and which her Sunday school teachers grew many years ago, now bear many fruits as she shares God's love with her students.

As some of you have seen and told me, a twenty two year old Korean, Sung-bong Choi amazed people around the world with his great voice by singing 'Nella Fantasia' on "Korea's Got Talent". Here is some of his inspiring story. He was left in an orphanage when he was three, and when he was five, he ran away after he was beaten by people there. He sold gum and energy drinks on the street. He slept on stairs or in public toilets for ten years. One day when he was selling gum at a nightclub, he was fascinated by a singer who sang folk songs very beautifully. From that moment he started to like singing, and practiced by himself. That's the story that most people have heard, but there is another story behind the story. He wasn't just self-taught; he actually had received some musical training by attending vocal classes at a local music school. But he only took those music lessons because, when he was in a youth shelter, he met a teacher who recognized his musical talent and did everything they could to help him fulfill his dream. His life looked like it was rooted in the worst kind of soil, but there was a teacher who looked past his hopeless circumstance and helped him grow the seed of his dream.

There is God's seed in every person, and it will grow with our love and care. Our high-risk sower went out to sow in all the places where a more cautious person would have held back, so let's follow the sower to tend the precious shoots of life *wherever* we find them.