

Grounded} Wife

TAKING A MORE IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE GROUND
WE'RE CULTIVATING IN OUR MARRIAGES



*A resource by Lauren Diggs
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NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

If you told me two years ago I'd be writing a devotional for wives based on Matthew 13:1-9, I probably would've questioned what that passage has to do with being a wife. But, as I'm sure you know, God sometimes has a way of speaking to us from the unlikeliest of places. Do you recall Moses and the burning bush or Balaam and his donkey? So, here I am, and here we go.

As I sit here, I'm surrounded by commentaries, pages of notes, my Bible, and a piping hot cup of green tea. My husband, Stephen, stands only a few feet away from me in the kitchen, scrolling his phone while our two high schoolers are upstairs doing school virtually (thanks for that, 2020). Meanwhile, our six-year-old is running around the living room in her pj's and winter hat (it's currently 70 degrees outside) belting out "Deck the Halls." Well, it's just "fa-la-la-la-la" over and over and over again, but you get the picture.

Needless to say, it's not exactly the quiet writing nook I envisioned when God spoke so gently to me about sharing this message with you. But let's be honest, that is not real life. And if anything that we talk about here will be lived out, it must be lived out in real life.

If you're like me, you've probably already looked up Matthew 13:1-9 and are wondering what the parable of the four soils has to do with being a wife. I've read this passage of scripture many times in my life, and it's one I've heard many sermons preached on. It's one of my favorite parables that Jesus tells. Probably because it shows us that as we do His work, scattering His seeds of love + truth, He will multiply those results when the ground is fertile and ready. Basically, I can put forth the effort, but the results are His. It's such a huge weight lifted to know we don't have to make things happen for the Lord. We just carry on about His business, doing what He's purposed us to do (love God, love neighbor), and He will produce the fruit.

It's the same in our marriage. I can't imagine you went into your marriage wanting it to be dead and lifeless. I know I sure didn't. But life happens--kids come on the scene, work is demanding, finances are a mess, laundry never ends--and before you know it, you're not sure who that person on the other end of the couch is, or better yet, who you are anymore. It feels empty. You feel alone. You're frustrated. And you're not quite sure how you got here.

Marriage takes work. It requires sacrifice. And it calls for a lot of grace. But even in all that, it's meant to be alive and producing good fruit. But that doesn't happen by allowing life to take over, and then one day, "when things settle down," it will be good, and you'll have the life you envisioned together. No, it is a day in and day out of choosing your spouse: choosing to love them, choosing to cultivate your marriage's ground to be that fertile soil that Matthew 13:8 refers to. It's recognizing that you cannot control your spouse and the choices he makes, but you can decide to love him unconditionally, forgive him when it's needed, and be the best helpmate for your husband you can be.

As you read through these pages, my prayer is you will allow God to search your heart and reveal the type of ground, you as a wife, are entrenched in. We need to know precisely where we are to understand where we need God to change us. Listen, your marriage was planted in the ground on the day you said "I do." Whether that was yesterday or 20 years ago is of no importance. Where your husband is or isn't at spiritually is not our focus. Why? Because this is about you and the wife that God has purposed you to be. God chose you and only you for the role of wife to your husband. There's always work to be done in you, always ground to stir up in you, and always growth to take place in you. So, let's dig in.

*Lauren Diggs +
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THE FOOTPATH

One day, early on in our marriage, I was folding a load of towels. It's my favorite type of laundry--there's just something about the clean lines and how evenly they lay when stacked that makes me happy on the inside. Well, Stephen happened to be home from work that day and picked up towels and started folding. Now, one might think this was the best thing in the world- your husband helping with laundry. But not me. All I could see in front of me were crooked lines, crumpled edges, and a leaning, very uneven stack of towels, and I just couldn't control myself. I proceeded to let him know that every towel was folded wrong, showed him the *right* way to do it, and then refolded every. single. one. of. them. Needless to say, he didn't exactly wanna jump in and help with the laundry much after that.

Jesus introduces us to the first type of soil, the footpath, in Matthew 13:4, "***As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them.***"

Now, you might be wondering what a footpath has to do with folding towels. Well, let's take a minute to think about a footpath. They are usually well worn, trampled upon by runners, hiking adventures, kids, bikes, and animals. There's generally not much life growing within one because before anything has time to take root and grow, it's eaten up by the wildlife or crushed by everyday life traffic. It's hard for things to grow in this type of ground, much like it would be hard for our marriage to grow if this is the kind of ground we're cultivating as a wife.

Usually, the foundation of this ground comes from a need to control every aspect of our life, from our biggest worry to the smallest tasks. Seeing as how we have to be in control, we have zero interest in listening. We just want to prove our point and show we're right. More times than not, it's our way or no way when making decisions. We might say we want their input, but the second it doesn't match our agenda, we bulldoze and manipulate to get our way. Even when good is being done or said, we will point out all the reasons why it still wasn't good enough. Recall the towel folding incident?

Perhaps, for you, it's not the folding of towels but the way he loads the dishwasher or just leaves the dirty dishes in the sink altogether. It might be asking him to handle a situation with the kids but then coming in behind him because he didn't do it the way you would have. Maybe it's the nagging, quarrelsome way you *remind* him of the honey-do-list. Or the way you nit-pick his driving every time you're in the car. I could keep listing off examples (unfortunately from experience), but the bottom line is, we want control, so the things we say and do come from that place.

When we act or speak out of this space, we create footpath type ground as a wife. So even when good seeds are scattered, they're being devoured by our demands and self-interest. Our disapproval and constant objections are crushing the life that has sprouted up. And the growth that has taken place is eaten up by our nagging and nit-picking. The Bible is very clear about a quarrelsome wife--she is "***like the constant dripping of a leaky roof***" (***Proverbs 19:13***). I don't know about you, but the constant dripping of a leaky roof would be a very annoying part of life, and I don't want to be that for my husband. Life already brings its own annoyances; we don't need to add to it.

"But Lauren, if I don't *remind* him, things just don't get done."

I hear you, sister, believe me. But I'm not talking about being the *helpmate* God designed us to be by gently reminding our spouse of things. I'm talking about the nagging, quarrelsome way we do things, and I think you know the difference. And if you don't, ask Jesus. He will be quick to let you know if you're falling more under quarrelsome than helpmate because He doesn't want you dwelling there.

Now listen, before you get discouraged, none of us is the perfect wife, nor will we ever have the perfect marriage. But perfection isn't the goal; progress is. Control isn't the goal; contentment in all things is. You being right isn't the goal; your *marriage being right* is.

So, if you find your ground, as a wife, to be like that of a footpath, it's time to do a little digging. Yes, while there is work to do, you are not working alone. Yes, while the changes needing to be made will be hard, the hard is not done in your own strength. And yes, while you will have to surrender a lot, your surrender *gives way* to God's sovereignty.

Digging Deeper

"BUT BE DOERS OF THE WORD, AND NOT HEARERS ONLY, DECEIVING YOURSELVES." ~ JAMES 1:22

- Pray and ask the Lord to reveal any *footpath* areas in you. (i.e., "What are areas in my marriage I find myself needing control of that then cause me to nag and nit-pick? What is something my spouse does that I tend to quarrel with him over?") Write them down and commit to praying over them instead of trying to control them.
- Ask the Lord for forgiveness over these things. Then, confess them to your spouse, ask for his forgiveness also, and let him know you are working on doing better. (This *will not* be easy, but remember, the hard isn't done in your own strength, but the Lord's.)
- List 3 things your husband does well and then encourage him in those areas.
- Read Matthew 13:1-9, really focusing on verses 5-6 to prepare for the next section.

THE SHALLOW + ROCKY GROUND

Back in 2017, Stephen was deployed to the Middle East for a year. We found out nearly a year before he had to leave, so I started preparing myself for what married life 10,000 miles apart would look like. I bought a book for married couples who go through deployments for us to read together while he was gone. I bought a journal and started journaling in it the year before he left, and I hid it in his luggage so he'd find it when he was unpacking. I even did a boudoir photoshoot and had the pictures put in a photobook to surprise him with when he came home. (I'm turning red in the cheeks just remembering this!) I had so many hopes for what that year apart was going to do for our marriage. I dreamed of growing closer, writing letters, fondness in my heart from the absence, and really, truly *thriving* during that time.

Well, fast forward to his return in 2018--we never finished the book I bought for us to read together, he read only parts of the journal I'd written for him over the year, we did write letters but not close to what I'd imagined, and we certainly did not thrive. In fact, we barely survived it. It was much more challenging than we ever could've anticipated. But, the problem wasn't the actual deployment. The problem was our foundation before he even stepped foot on foreign soil because things were hard even when we were living in the same home. We loved each other tremendously, but we'd been walking through some stuff from our past that was just ugly, and we were struggling to make sense of it all.

"Where was this coming from?"

"I thought we'd healed from this."

"How can this be happening again?"

"Why NOW?!"

These were just a few of the many questions I asked God often during those days. Needless to say, things were rocky.

Much like the ground Jesus talks about in Matthew 13: 5-6, ***"Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn't have deep roots, they died."***

You see, up to this point in our marriage, we'd overcome a lot, but having to face something that nearly broke us years before all over again was nothing short of devastating. We were wilting and wilting fast. So, I did what any great wife would do--I got us into some counseling, I dove into marriage book after marriage book, I prepared us both for the upcoming deployment with all those things I mentioned above. We went on dates and a marriage retreat, we talked (and fought) a lot about what was going on, and did just about everything you're *supposed* to do. I just knew all of those things combined were going to catapult us into a thriving season in our marriage and get us out of that rocky ground.

You see, even though we were doing all the right things, we weren't doing the *main* thing. Our marriage was on shallow, rocky ground because we were trying to grow it in our strength with all the books and date nights and counseling sessions and hand-written letters we could get our hands on. Please hear me when I say this: marriage books, counseling, date nights, romantic gestures, etc., are not wrong or bad. Hello!! I'm writing about being the wife God purposed you to be, so clearly, I'm not opposed to these things. But, what I am saying is that those things alone will only do so much without a deep-rooted foundation in Jesus. And that was where we found ourselves. It wasn't until I started focusing on my relationship with Jesus that I saw real change.

That book, that counselor, that gift, that next date night, that weekend marriage retreat--all the things will never root our marriages deep enough for the growth we're longing for unless we first meet with

Jesus. Anything in our lives disconnected from Him is shallow and fleeting and produces nothing. He tells us this in John 15:5, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."*

I still read marriage books, I still advocate for counseling (for real!), I still love a good gift or date night. They can be excellent (and sometimes necessary) additions, but I no longer look to those things as the sole hope or saving grace in my marriage. I no longer exhaust myself trying to fix everything in my weakened power and fading strength. I daily connect myself to the one true source of life and allow Him to have His way.

Do you find yourself running to every new marriage book or retreat? Do you load your schedule with counseling sessions and date nights? Do you have constant anxiety over needing to do all the right things because if you don't, everything will fall apart? Sweet, sweet friend, hear me when I say: **surrender**. Your purpose as a wife isn't to *make* growth happen in your marriage. That is God's job. Your purpose is to surrender each day to Him and do what He is directing you, and only you to do. Maybe it is reading a marriage book together or on your own. Perhaps it's getting some counseling or seeking out a woman of God for accountability. It will most definitely mean changes made in you as a wife. But until you surrender it all under His authority and seek His purpose, those things will have you spinning your wheels and leave you exhausted. We must first seek the Lord, do what He is calling us to do, and leave the results of our *"surrendered effort"* (Michelle Myers, *She Works His Way*) in His hands.

So, if you find your ground, as a wife, to be shallow and rocky, it's time to go back to the foundation. It's time to refocus. It's time to go deeper.

Digging Deeper

"BUT BE DOERS OF THE WORD, AND NOT HEARERS ONLY, DECEIVING YOURSELVES." ~ JAMES 1:22

- Pray and ask the Lord to reveal the areas where you are putting hope in things outside of Him or even yourself to fix your marriage.
- Write down any areas of your marriage that you need to surrender to Him and commit to following His direction instead of your agenda.
- List 3 aspects of your marriage that are strong and good.
- Read Matthew 13: 1-9, focusing on verse 7 to prepare for the next section.

THE THORNY GROUND

Three years into our marriage, Stephen had a brief affair with a coworker. At this point, we were two kids deep and still so very young—babies raising babies. I'm not going to go into the details on these pages (that's a story for another time), but I will suffice it to say, it was one of the hardest times in our marriage. We did a lot of work to put the pieces back together; however, our marriage's continuation and restoration rests entirely with God. We wouldn't be where we are today, and we won't be wherever God leads us in the future without Him. But healing is a funny thing. We can be completely and wholeheartedly healed from a deep wound and still make choices from a place of hurt or anticipation of more hurt. And that space is where I found myself for years after the affair--healed but keeping score and acting like if it weren't for me, we wouldn't exist.

Even writing these words makes me have a knot in my stomach. How arrogant of me to even think I was the saving grace in our marriage, let alone keep score and throw it around like a badge of honor.

Gross. But I did.

Anytime we'd get into a big fight, I'd like to proudly remind him that if it weren't for me being so forgiving and long-suffering, we wouldn't be married. I would list off all the many ways I held us together when things would start to fall apart. Basically, the score was Lauren: Infinity, Stephen: Zero. Unless I was feeling generous, then maybe a couple of points for him working hard to provide for us. (Now, if we were sharing our testimony with others, I'd give God all the glory, but internally, I kept tally and gave myself a trophy.) And there was nothing that dude was gonna do to catch up to all the points I'd racked up over the years. It wasn't just points for forgiving the affair. I'd even started keeping score of all the things I would do for our family, our home--laundry, homeschooling, driving all over, cooking, cleaning, diapers, feedings, disciplining, grocery shopping, dishes. You name it; I counted it. And I let him know it whenever we started to argue, or I felt like I wasn't appreciated. It was a dangerous and demeaning space for me to live in, and it was very damaging to our marriage.

Scorekeeping is not only demeaning in marriage but's also against God's design. 1 Corinthians 13:4-5 tells us, ***"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged."***

But here I was keeping a record of it all when the only kind of record we should be keeping in our marriage and life is the one where God gets all the glory because we are nothing without Him. And a running list of all the things we love about our spouse wouldn't hurt either.

You see, keeping score is sharp and cutting. It keeps us tangled in a false sense of reality. And it will choke the life out of any growth taking place in our life and our marriage.

"Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants." Matthew 13:7

We are very tender beings, and no matter how *manly* our man is, we must not forget he is also tender. Part of our assignment as his wife is to love him with the care and kindness of Jesus. But, try as we may, we cannot do this in our strength and ability alone. We *must* depend on Jesus for help. Our intentions may be good, but without the power of the Holy Spirit working through us, we will quickly become frustrated at our efforts, at the lack of change we're trying to make happen, and we'll eventually be back to where we started. Keeping score only perpetuates the lie in our minds that we hold it all together. When, in fact, we know there's only *One* who holds all things together--God. And until we rightly put ourselves where we belong in our marriage (God first, spouse second, us third), we will continually keep a record.

THE FERTILE GROUND

When Stephen came back from his deployment in the Middle East, he came back a changed man. The things he was witness to and had to work through over there altered him. And honestly, it would probably do the same to most of us. When he came home, he was angry, closed off, and he hated people—his words, not mine.

One of the most significant transformations was his plan for his future outside the Coast Guard. He'd talked about being a cop in the past, then we were in youth ministry for years, and we talked about pastoring in some capacity after retirement. I mean, at one point in life, we wanted to buy an RV and travel around ministering the gospel, so this wasn't some fleeting notion we'd had late one night after way too many nachos and hot wings. It was *real* for us.

But, he'd changed his mind and was determined to go into law enforcement. There were many reasons I didn't like this, and the main one being I was tired of doing life without him. I was tired of shift work, long and unpredictable hours, and having to plan life around him only to have something change at the last minute and him not be there anyway. Bottom line: *I* was tired.

I didn't want anything remotely close to what he'd done for the last 20 years, and law enforcement was in the same wheelhouse. So, anytime the topic came up that first year he was back, it turned into an all-out war zone kind of argument. I didn't know what I wanted for him after retirement; I just knew I didn't want that. He didn't listen to me, and I certainly didn't listen to him. It was me against him, and that is never grounds for healthy growth in marriage.

I decided to commit this topic to prayer and ask God to change it. Well, really change Stephen because I just *knew* I was on the right side of God with this one. And He did answer my prayer but not in the way I thought He would.

He changed *me*. He changed *my* heart. He changed my mind. He showed me my husband's heart was *still* to serve and love people. And doing so through law enforcement was what He'd given Stephen the heart to do. I had been reacting from such a self-serving place that I was willing to discourage my husband from doing what God had called him to do. (OUCH!) Needless to say, I did some repenting and apologizing. What was once an explosive, divisive topic for us became a tender and open space for us to dream together about our future again and where God would lead us. All because God was in His rightful place in life, and I was in mine.

A.W. Tozer sums it up best with this, ***"As God is exalted to the right place in our lives, a thousand problems are solved all at once."***

When I think back over our 20 years of marriage, and all the times I fought so hard for control and *my* way before finally surrendering to God, I can see what needed to change the most: *me*. God will do way more with our ***surrender*** than we will ever do in our striving. When we surrender to Him instead of striving in our strength, we cultivate fertile ground that is ready for God to produce growth and a great harvest.

"Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!" Matthew 13:8

This fertile ground in marriage is cultivated when we intentionally put Him *first* above all else. It's making sure we're rooted in the life-giving source that is Jesus. This heart and headspace are where He does some digging. It's where He uproots what doesn't belong and fills us with what does. It's where we get to deeply know the characteristics and aspects of God that can only be known through time spent seeking

Him, reading His word, listening to His voice, and surrendering to His will. It's where change happens, and growth takes place. And it's where we can be the wife God has called us to be.

Listen, I know you're not the only person in your marriage. I know there's an aspect of this that is well outside of your control, but it's not outside of God's. He wants to bring about change, and that change starts with *you*. Regardless of our marriage circumstances, there's always work to be done in us and us alone. You see, God's not asking us to fix all that's wrong in our lives and our marriage. He's just asking us to love Him above all else and to seek Him *first*. **The results of what comes after that are in His hands.**

So, my sweet friend, if you are longing for that fertile ground, that rich soil, that harvest that is **"thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!"** in your marriage, it's time to get your hands a little dirty and do some digging. It won't always feel good, it definitely won't always look pretty, and it won't be perfect for sure. But remember, perfection isn't the goal; progress is. Control isn't the goal; contentment in all things is. You being right isn't the goal; your *marriage being right* is. And **surrender** is how we get there.

Digging Deeper

"BUT BE DOERS OF THE WORD, AND NOT HEARERS ONLY, DECEIVING YOURSELVES." ~ JAMES 1:22

- Commit to praying over your marriage every day. Some days that prayer might be full of joy for what God is doing. Other days it might be full of surrender and tear-stained pages. And some days, you'll find yourself in the in-between. Whatever the case, commit it to prayer.
- Write about a time in your marriage when you surrendered, and God produced growth. We need to look back and be reminded of the goodness of God. It reminds us of what we *know* is coming even when we can't see it.
- Take a picture of your hands digging in some dirt. I would say just pull one from Google, but I challenge you to actually get **your** hands in the ground. Dig around a little. Feel it between your fingers. Get your hands dirty. And then, put the picture in your Bible or prayer journal or somewhere that you will be reminded to keep digging while living in surrender.

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