

Throwing Seed—Matthew 13:3-23

By Justin Smith

The past several months, I had gospel conversations with two men and with two very different responses. The first story involves my cousin Drew.

When Drew graduated from high school, the possibilities of travel and numerous occupations led him into the Air Force. My interactions with him were like Facebook feeds over the family grapevine: Drew graduated from basic, left for his first deployment, and, eventually, was expecting a child with the daughter of an Air Force general. We flew out to Phoenix for a quick wedding, and I didn't hear much from him for a couple of years.

Meanwhile, I had become a Christian and transferred to Wheaton College. During my first semester at Wheaton I heard the gut-wrenching news: Drew, whose second child had been born while Drew was deployed overseas, had come home, but there was no family welcome party at the airport. Instead, he arrived at his apartment—the one he left with a pregnant wife, a young son and dishes in the sink—only to find it empty, cleaned out of everything that had made it a home. His wife requested to meet him at a coffee shop, where she issued him papers to sign for a divorce.

I made an effort to stay in contact with Drew during this time with a few calls here and there, praying for him and trying to point him to the firm foundation when all else was giving way. He was receptive to what I had to say, but communication tapered off as we drifted into our respective lives.

After graduating from Wheaton, I began work with a food distribution company. I was placed on an account that was based out of Phoenix—Drew's home. During my intermittent travels to Arizona I made sure to connect with him and his new family, which now included five boys under the age of six: his two sons from his previous marriage, his fiancé's two sons from a previous relationship and their newborn son. A few months ago, I visited Drew and shared my testimony in a more complete and thorough way than I had in the past. I challenged Drew to read through the Gospel of Mark with me, suggesting that we could discuss it one chapter at a time during our commutes home from work. He agreed.

The next month we shared many phone calls. Drew was quick to draw practical applications from the Scriptures—almost too ready to do so—and our conversations were increasingly fruitful. He knew there was a commitment to Christ that he needed to make but he wasn't quite ready to take that next step. We spoke of a local church for him to attend, and soon his visits there turned to a more regular attendance. One day he called me and told me that he had given his life to Christ during a meeting with his new pastor. I was overjoyed, but immediately wondered what this new

commitment would mean for his family situation. What would it look like for him to walk faithfully here? I knew there were a lot of thorns that might grow up, and I did not yet know the depth of the soil in which the good seed had been planted.

Just a couple weeks ago, I heard from Drew—on the heels of his fiancée walking out. Drew, unsure if she will even come back, made a statement indicative of good soil, "Since I was saved on February 25, I have decided that whatever happens in my life—even if I have to lose my kids or my fiancée—I can always count on God."

The second narrative of evangelism is about Arshad, a Muslim coworker of mine. I began having conversations with Arshad when I overheard him and a couple of other coworkers debating about Jesus during the lunch hour. I was sitting alone reading, and quite content to do so, but decided to join the conversation. I walked up and asked, "I heard y'all mention Jesus. Do you mind if I join?" They welcomed me and immediately Arshad leveled his first claim: No one could prove from the Bible that Jesus was divine. I had my Bible and quickly read Colossians 3:15-20 to him. Arshad then tailored his claim to encompass just the Gospels. After a couple of weeks of lunchroom conversations and a visit to my College Church small group, I asked Arshad to read through the Gospel of Mark with me. To my surprise, he agreed.

Even after a couple of months of continuous reading the Gospels, particularly of Mark and Luke, Arshad was totally unchanged. We read of Jesus' baptism and the proclamation of the Father, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." We discussed similar words God declared during the story of the Mount of Transfiguration, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." Arshad's eyes would glaze over or turn contentedly to his lunch; then he would claim later that the Gospels teach that Jesus is not the Son of God, only a prophet. Arshad's claims were maddening. He was on a sea of lily pads, hopping from pad to pad whenever the current one was about to sink. He would assert that if Christians truly followed Jesus, we would not eat pork. But, after suggesting he read Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council and the Epistle to the Galatians, he would quickly jump onto the lily pad of textual criticism. So we proceeded, and I could tell Arshad had no more interest in learning about Jesus than a blind man who refuses to acknowledge the existence of color. The birds were devouring the seed as soon as it would fall on the soil.

We do not know what will come of our efforts to share the gospel, but we do know that he who commands us to do so, is the One who does the growing. As Paul writes, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." (1 Cor. 3:6). Brothers and sisters, let us then be ones who throw the seed far and wide, and trust in God for the growth.

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