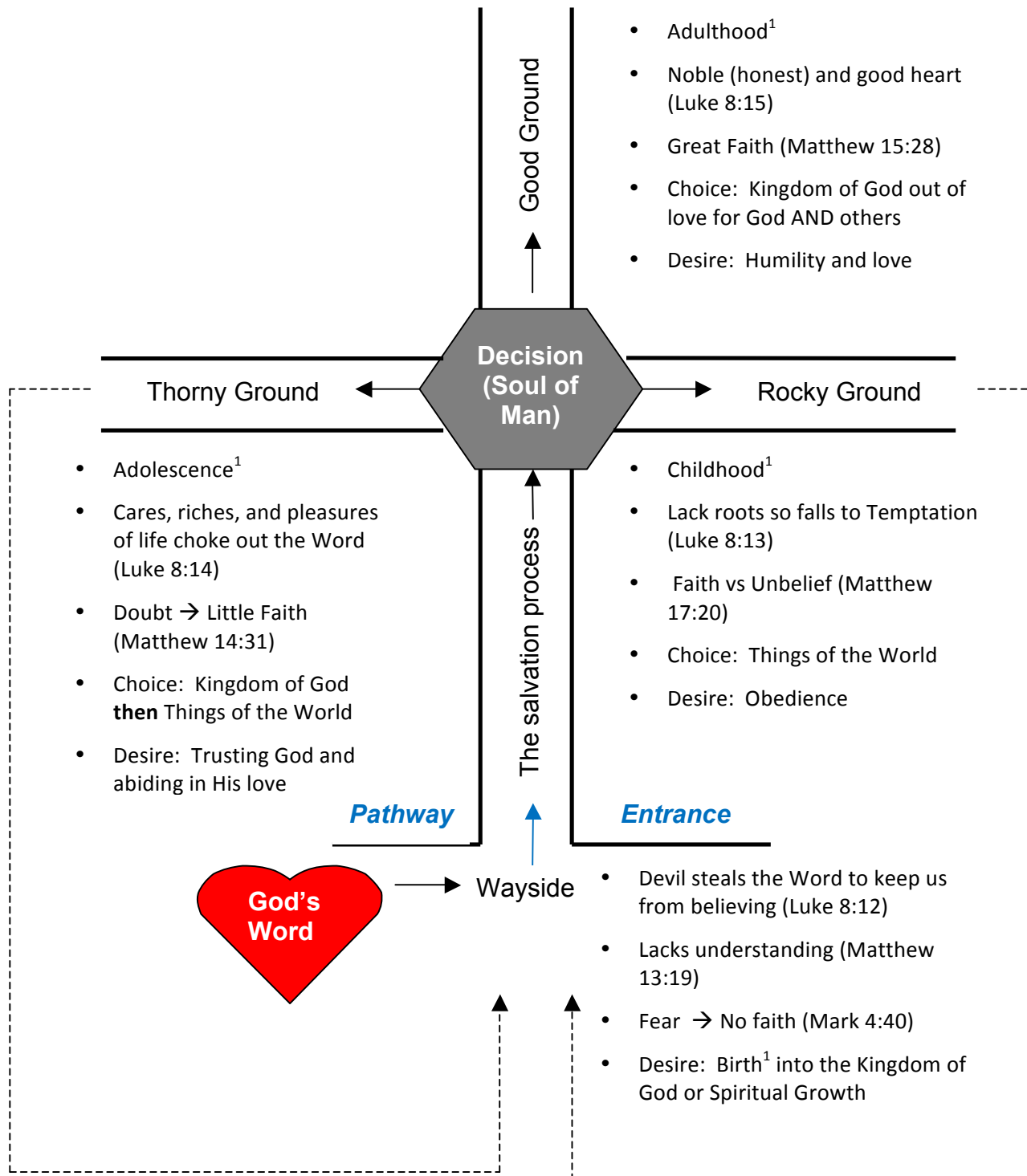




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Four-Way Stop Sign and the Soils



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This illustration represents the four soils in terms of our decision making process.

- ***The Red Heart:*** Represents the seeds of God Word that are planted in our heart. It is the Word of God that is tested in our lives and begins the process of salvation and spiritual growth.
- ***Stop Sign:*** The Stop Sign represents our point of decision.
 - *What will we choose?* Deuteronomy 30:19 gives us two choices: life or death.
 - *Life:* If we choose life, we choose the Kingdom of God, and our heart eventually becomes good ground for the seeds of God's Word. We live according to the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus to cultivate soil that will produce fruit in the Kingdom of God.
 - *Death:* If we choose death, we choose the Things of the World, and our heart remains rocky or thorny. As a result, we never produce any fruit in our life. Instead, we live according to the law of sin and death and cultivate soil that produces the works of the flesh.
 - *How will we choose?* Whenever we reach the stop sign, our will determines what path we follow. Since we must choose between life and death, there is only black and white, as it were. However, the stop sign is gray because our soul is said to be our mind, our ***will***, and our emotions. Therefore, it is within the gray area of our soul that we must decide what path to follow! Life or death. Spirit or flesh. God's Word or our emotions!
 - *Questions that affect our decision:* Each time we reach a decision point, here are some questions we can ask ourselves:
 - What seed of God's Word has been planted in my life that is now being tested so I may produce fruit?
 - Do I love Jesus enough to obey His Word? (John 14:15)
 - How submitted am I to abiding in His Word and His Word in me (John 15:4-8)
 - *Some things to ponder:*
 - Until we are birthed into the Kingdom by accepting Jesus as Lord, we are in bondage to the sin nature that exists within us all. (Romans 7:14). Once we have accepted Jesus as Lord, THEN we begin the process of spiritual growth, ultimately seeking to produce fruit that is worthy of repentance (Luke 3:8). Thus, when we look at our illustration, we will notice that we do not even come to the stop sign until we reach the point of having to choose between rocky, thorny, and good ground. It is at this point, that our will determines which path we will take.

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- When transitioning between soils (learning how to make different choices), we may find ourselves “standing” at the point of decision (the stop sign) while we wait on God (Ephesians 6:10). Know that it’s okay to be still before the Lord, not moving until He illuminates the path for us to take (Psalm 119:105).
- While standing, allow God to reveal any sin in our life, so that we can *repent* for that sin. Ask Him to show us what Word He has planted in our heart that He is seeking to bring to harvest. *Confess* the Word that God has revealed over our life until we *believe* it in our heart. Confessing is more than repeating what the Word says. It is meditating on it. It is allowing it to soften our hearts so that we can receive God’s *forgiveness* for our sins and extend that same forgiveness to others so His Word can penetrate our heart. It is asking God to help us with any unbelief, and then thanking Him because we know that the Word will *transform* our heart and help us produce new *acts* (*works*).

Now, let us begin our journey through the soils:

- ***Wayside:***

- *What does it look like?* When our heart is by the wayside, we receive the word into our heart, but we do not hold onto it.
- *What is our hindrance?*
 - We allow the devil to steal the Word from our heart to keep us from believing (Luke 8:12).
 - We have fear and “no faith” (Mark 4:40). The fear of what we will lose by coming to or obeying God keeps us trapped where we are!
 - We lack understanding, so we either don’t realize we need a Savior or we don’t know how the Word applies to our life (Matthew 13:19)
- *Results:*
 - We fail to be birthed into the Kingdom of God OR
 - We fail to develop spiritually and remain babes in Christ
- *How to take a different path:*
 - Pre-salvation before being birthed into the Kingdom:
 - Recognize that because of the sin nature that lives within all of us, we need a Savior--Jesus is that Savior.

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- Recognize that “godly sorrow produces repentance, leading to salvation, not to be regretted, but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:10).
- **Repent** for our sin, **confess** that Jesus is Lord and **believe** in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, so that we can be saved.
- Receive **forgiveness** for our sins and extend that same forgiveness to others
- Post-salvation after being birthed into the Kingdom:
 - Recognize that the devil will seek to steal EVERY seed of God’s Word that we hear.
 - Recognize the truth in God’s Word is what saves our souls -- *delivers and protect us*² (James 1:21).
 - Recognize that God only works in our lives through the truth of His Word (Psalm 33:4).
 - Cultivate relationship with God through study, prayer, praise, worship, and fellowship with other believers, so that we can water the seed once it is planted.
 - Decide that we want to grow spiritually, so we are going to examine our own work (our reaction) instead of blaming others for our behavior (Ephesians 6:4).
 - Decide we are going to allow God’s Word to **transform us** so our **acts (works)** will produce fruit worthy of repentance (Luke 3:8).
- *Something to ponder:* Once birthed into the Kingdom, we grow spiritually by renewing our minds (Romans 12:1-2) with God’s Word. As we learn to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12), we will find that we are in a continuing process of **repentance, confession, belief, forgiveness, transformation, and acts (works)**. Without this spiritual growth, we remain babes in Christ. As babes, we are vulnerable to eventually backsliding and turning away from Jesus. This is no different than a baby born into the world; if not properly fed, she will eventually starve to death for lack of nourishment.
- **Rocky Ground:**
 - *What does it look like?* When our heart is rocky ground, we are children in the Kingdom of God seeking to take our first steps towards spiritual growth. We are able to receive the Word with joy and we **believe** that it is true, but we have no roots (Luke 8:13)!

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- *What is our hindrance?*
 - Because we lack roots, we allow temptation to overcome us (Luke 8:13).
 - We don't realize the purity of our childlike faith allows us to receive the Word with joy; however, our unbelief keeps us more focused on the circumstances than on what God's Word says about those circumstances (Matthew 17:20)!
- *Results:*
 - We remain carnal (Romans 7:14b), living by the law of the sin and death (Romans 8:2b).
 - Deliverance over sin does not occur!
 - We remain vulnerable to backsliding and possibly turning away from Jesus.
- *How to take a different path:*
 - Recognize that there is something in us that is creating the temptation (James 1:14).
 - Ask God to show us what sin the devil is tempting us with and **repent** from those dead works (Hebrews 6:1).
 - Know that we must acknowledge what God reveals to us as sin. We must also decide within ourselves that we want to take a different path.
 - Recognize that what we are going through is common to man and that God has provided a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). Don't be afraid to ask God to show us the way of escape!
 - Get rid of "but," "I think," "God wants me to be happy," "It's not fair," "I want," "I feel," and every other argument that exalts itself against the knowledge of God's Word (2 Corinthians 10:5).
 - Recognize that just as Jesus had to overcome Satan in the wilderness, so must we (Luke 4:1-13). Our journey is not about others and what they do or don't do, but about us learning to overcome the temptation **WE** are faced with!
 - Choose to obey the Word (life) that we've learned instead of giving into the temptation (death) that we know (Deuteronomy 30:19)!
- *Something to ponder:* Just as parents immediately tend to the need of their small children, God will sometimes do the same with us. As we

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begin the process of spiritual growth, God may quickly answer our prayers to demonstrate His faithfulness and help to strengthen our faith.

- ***Thorny Ground:***

- *What does it look like?* When our heart is thorny ground, we are adolescents in the Kingdom of God seeking to mature spiritually. We have a developing root system, but our soil is full of weeds!
- *What is our hindrance?*
 - We allow the “cares, riches, and pleasures of life” to choke out the Word, thus keeping our fruit from maturing (Luke 8:14).
 - We have allowed our childlike faith that can move mountains (Matthew 17:20) to become mixed with doubt, creating “little faith” (Matthew 14:31).
- *Results:*
 - We find ourselves struggling with sin, not doing what we want to do and doing what we don’t want to do (Romans 7:19).
 - Doubt causes us to be tossed to and fro and keeps us from receiving from God (James 1:6-7)
 - While less susceptible to backsliding from sins that are not “socially acceptable,” we can become engrossed in self which is a form of idolatry. If not dealt with, this idolatry can create resentment towards God causing us to turn away from Him when He fails to meet our expectations!
- *How to take a different path:*
 - Learn how to go through our trials
 - Recognize our faith is being tested and count it all joy, because God is seeking to produce fruit in our life (James 1:1-2)
 - Learn who our real enemy is and the weapons of our warfare God gives us to combat that enemy (2 Corinthians 10:4).
 - Cast our cares on Jesus for He cares for us (1 Peter 5:6-7).
 - Ask God for wisdom, so that we will learn from our trial (James 1:3). Seek to determine what is really going on in our heart.
 - *Is it the cares of life?* Are we allowing things that are happening around us (home, work, marriage, and other relationships) to distract us from God?

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- *Is it the deceitfulness of riches?* Are we trapped by our desire for things or for financial security? Are we allowing having money, or not, to determine our level of joy?
- *Is it the pleasures of life?* Are we more focused on pleasing our flesh than we are pleasing God? Are we seeking approval from people or desiring for them to meet our needs?
- *Is it a combination of any or all of the above?*
- Recognize that conflict exists *because* of our desire for pleasure; therefore, if God is not answering our prayer, examine our motives and what we are praying for. Are we asking amiss that we may receive relief from our circumstances (James 4:3), or are we asking God to help us bring glory to His name (John 14:13)?
- Determine to go through the trial with the right attitude, knowing that it's okay to be cast down WITHOUT becoming conquered (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).
- Learn how to allow the trial to build our trust in God as we lean on Him, asking Him to direct our path (Proverbs 3:5-7).
- Learn how to abide in God's love because it is that love that will sustain us (John 15:9-11).
- *Something to ponder:* It is in our thorny ground moments that we truly learn how to trust God. No longer are our prayers being answered immediately, thus this is when God truly teaches us how to wear the full armor so we may withstand in the evil day (Ephesians 6:11). It is also in our thorny ground moments that we learn how to truly love God and love others, for perfect love casts out all fear (1 John 4:18).
- *Good Ground:*
 - *What does it look like?* When our heart is good ground, we have become adults in the Kingdom of God. Our soil is fertile and our roots run deep!
 - *Results:*
 - Our heart is noble (honest) and good--beneficial for others as well as ourselves.
 - We patiently produce fruit that is worthy of repentance (Luke 3:8)!
 - We have great faith; as a result, we have been made whole (Matthew 15:28)! We no longer respond to others from our wounds, but out of a loving heart

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- We are willing and obedient out of our love for God and for others and not for what we hope to gain. We are no longer seeking relief from our circumstances; instead, we are seeking to bring God glory! We have learned to abide (John 15:7-8)!
- *How to stay on the path:*
 - Stay out of pride!!!! God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble (James 4:6).
 - Never think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Romans 12:3).
 - Take heed when we think we are standing lest we fall (1 Corinthians 10:12).
- *Something to ponder:* Even when we have a good heart, our sin nature is always ready to have a voice in our lives! We must remember that EVERY seed of God's Word will have to be processed through the four soils. Therefore, we must never become so arrogant within ourselves that we think we cannot fall to temptation, or give in to the trials of life, for surely, in that season, we will. It is only through the power of God's love, mercy, and grace that we can transition between the soils, ultimately becoming and remaining good ground to patiently produce fruit!

¹Paul D Meier, M.D et., *Introduction to Psychology and Counseling: Christian Perspectives and Applications*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1982, 1981), 256-257

²*Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 2003, QuickVerse, a division of Findex.com, Inc.