

## INTRODUCTION

It's really been exciting to occupy our new facility. This next week will be wonderful as we enjoy special Share the Joy services Tuesday through Friday night. Somebody in the community asked me when I thought we would "settle down" after all the initial excitement. I told him I thought we were not going to settle down, but that we would "settle up," because we will never again be exactly the same. After our short detour into the book of Joshua, this morning I resume my practice of teaching the Word verse by verse. We are going to look back in Luke to study one of Jesus' parables that will help you diagnose whether or not you have a teachable spirit.

At this moment, in this room, there are some folks who have their Bibles open, their pens and paper ready. They are almost literally sitting on the edge of their seats waiting for a word from God. However, there are many others who are almost yawning already. They might not have even brought a Bible; their biggest concern at this very moment is "When is this going to be over?" This parable is all about how well we listen to the Word of God. Are you a good listener?

One morning a man was reading the newspaper and he said to his wife, "Honey, listen to this: A study was done showing conclusively that women speak twice as many words as men!" His wife replied, "Well, it's simply because we always have to repeat ourselves because you men never hear us the first time we say something." Her husband said, "What did you say?" Husbands can often have "selective hearing" problems—and so can Christians. Are you really listening to God? Look for yourself in this passage beginning in Luke 8:1:

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping in to support them out of their own means.

It's interesting to note these women were vital to the ministry of Jesus and the disciples. They were behind the scenes supporting and encouraging Jesus' disciples. Thank God for faithful women who quietly serve Jesus!

Verse 8: While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown."

When he had said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." His disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, 'though seeing, they may not see; though hearing they may not understand.' This is the

meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devils comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches, and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.”

Jesus employed many agricultural metaphors because everyone in Galilee knew something about farming. We know from Jesus’ explanation the point of the parable is *not* seeds and dirt. It’s all about the Word of God and the heart-attitudes of people who hear the Word. People read about these four soil conditions and wonder if these are four different people. They usually suggest category #1 would be an unbeliever and category #4 would be a Believer but what about categories two and three? Are these people who were once saved, but fell away –or are they backslidden Christians?

I think that entire debate misses the point. I suggest these are not four different people; they are four different attitudes and it’s possible for each of us to reflect all four attitudes at different times in our lives.

The great Bible expositor, Ray Stedman, wrote:

I used to read this story as though these various soils were four different kinds of people, who remained the same all through their lifetimes—some were permanently hard-hearted, like the first example given; some were impulsive, some were full of concerns. But I have come to see that what our Lord is describing here is not four types of persons, so much, but conditions of our heart at any given moment. Whenever the Word is being taught, people are in one condition or another, just as they are described to us here. We have all been callous, at times, We have all been impulsive in our reaction—emotional and shallow. We have all been overly concerned about other matters. And we have all had times of being open and responsive to the Word.

So, as we study this parable, don’t try to figure out who is saved or lost, instead examine your own heart and see which of these four attitudes, or heart conditions characterizes your life *right now*:

### **1. A HARD HEART: NO RECEPTION SO THE WORD IS STOLEN**

This represents a person who may be here today or listening to me on television. You are “hearing” the Word of God, because I am preaching it. But my words may be going in one ear, but they are going out the other ear. God’s Word rolls off you like water off a duck’s back. You don’t consider yourself to be a hard-hearted person, but you just really aren’t interested in the Word of God. Your heart is like a pathway that has been trampled down until the dirt is hard-packed. What you are hearing today may be entering your ears, but it certainly won’t enter your heart.

There is something going on right now, invisible to the human eye, which makes it even harder to receive the Word of God. Jesus says Satan tries to "steal" the Word from you. It was common to see a flock of birds swarming around a farmer as he tossed his seed. The birds knew some of the seed would fall on the hardpan and they would swoop down and eat it. In the same way, the devil stands ready to try to steal the word away from people as soon as they hear it. Don't ever be surprised if you have trouble concentrating when you are reading the Bible or when you are hearing the Bible being taught. One of the enemy's most effective strategy is distraction. At this moment, Satan would love nothing better than for you to be distracted by this building, or these screens, or the choir, or the people around you. Why? He is actively attempting to steal the Word away from you.

## 2. A SHALLOW HEART: NO ROOT SO THE WORD IS STARVED

I believe most of you present today aren't in the first category, many of those folks never bother to attend church. Most of you at least have a Bible open and many of you are taking notes. However, it's very easy to slip into the category of the shallow heart.

Notice Jesus said these people receive the word with *joy*. They react with an emotional acceptance of the Word. They listen and they are happy to hear the Word. They will smile, shout "amen" and even shed a few tears of joy on Sunday. But by Tuesday morning, they are downcast and defeated. The emotion is gone, so the commitment is gone. They could be called "alka seltzer" hearers—they fizzle furiously for a short while and then they fade away.

This is a real warning to us about the danger of basing your Christian faith on your emotions. Some people think the reason they come to church is to get happy and they hope they can get enough joy to last them through the week so they can come back the next week and get a refill.

Last Sunday, the music and the message moved all of us to an emotional response. It was glorious and I enjoyed it. I've heard from about a hundred people this week who communicated it was "the best message they have ever heard" in their entire lives. And I sincerely appreciate all the kind comments. There were probably a lot of people asking, "Wow! Why doesn't he preach like that *every* Sunday?" Well, first of all, it would probably kill me, but also, as your pastor, it is not my desire to only touch your emotions; I'm trying to build healthy strong Christians, fully devoted, mature followers of Christ. Some of you will think after this message from Luke, "Well, that was nice, but nothing like last week!" That's why I believe God has called me to be a Pastor, teaching consistently feed you the meat of the Word of God Sunday after Sunday. We all love ice cream but if we ate it every meal, it would soon get old! Christmas is wonderful, but if it were Christmas every day, it would soon be disappointing. Be careful that you don't come to church just looking for a thrill—that's what Six Flags is for.

Don't get me wrong. I believe we should love God with our entire being, our mind, our wills, and our emotions. But your emotions are the shallowest part of your soul.

You may be wondering, "What's wrong with an emotional faith? I *want* to feel good about God!" Let's let Jesus tell us what's wrong with this kind of attitude: It doesn't stand up under the

heat. He speaks of trouble and testing that come into our lives; an emotionally based faith won't pass the test. In this parable, the plant had no root, so when the heat came, there was no depth so it withered and died. When the heat gets turned up in your life you need more than just an emotional faith. You need deep roots.

Are you “rooted and grounded” in the Word of God? The massive redwood trees out west are majestic to see—they soar to amazing heights—but surprisingly, they have short, weak roots. The reason they can stand and survive the elements is because the roots of each tree are intertwined with the roots of the trees around it. That's why you never see a redwood standing alone; it cannot support itself, it needs other trees to stand. What a beautiful picture of the Church! That's one reason why it's absolutely imperative for you to attend church. I will never say you have to attend church to go to heaven but I *will* say unapologetically, that you have to attend church to be a strong, growing, maturing Christian.

### **3. A CROWDED HEART: NO ROOM SO THE WORD IS STRANGLER**

It's my opinion this third category has more people in it than the first two combined. This represents the kind of attitude that hears the Word, receives it, and it is watered and nurtured and the person begins to really grow as a Christian. I believe this person has a genuine desire to be a deeply rooted, maturing Christian. But somewhere along the way their growth process is interrupted. They simply allow their lives to become so crowded with other interests that the impact of the Word of God gets choked out.

There is a limited amount of moisture and nutrients in soil, so weeds and thorns compete with the good plants. Jesus is warning us there are some things in our lives that compete with the Word of God. If you aren't careful they will just choke out the effectiveness of it. He mentions three of these thorn plants or weeds. Ask yourself if you are allowing any of these weeds to strangle the Word in your life. God's Word can be

#### **3.1 Strangled by worries**

Our English Word “worry” comes from the German Word “würgen” which means “to choke.” Worry is when the devil puts a mental and emotional choke hold on you. I've said before that I'm convinced the most prevalent sin among Christians is worry. There are two categories in of trouble in life, (1) Those you can't do anything about it; and (2) those you can do something about. If you can't do anything about your trouble, then why worry? If you *can* do something, why worry—do something! My attitude about worry can be summarized in a little poem I've quoted for years:

For every evil under the sun; either there is a cure; or there is none.  
If there be one—seek 'till you find it. If there be none—never mind it!

God's Word can be

#### **3.2 Strangled by wealth**

A better translation of this is found in Matthew 13:22 where Jesus warns about the “deceitfulness of wealth.” There is nothing inherently evil in wealth but wealth can fool you. It can give you a false sense of security and worth. It can deceive you into thinking you can buy your way into and out of any situation.

They called him the King. On August 16, 1977, Elvis died from complications of drug usage. Some said he “had it all.” Each year over 250,000 people still tour Graceland. You can see his motorcycles, his Cadillacs, his toys and his gold records. You can see his jets, one named Hound Dog II and one named the Lisa Marie. Elvis, loved to fly around the country late at night just to get things like ice cream or a special kind of peanut butter sold only in Denver.

Elvis’ younger stepbrother, Rick Stanley, spoke at our church in Alabama several times. Rick said he thought Elvis really loved Jesus at one time and his favorite style of music was always gospel music. But Elvis’ biggest mistake, according to Rick, was he allowed all the fame, all the money, and all the success to choke the word of God out of his life. He died sad and lonely, surrounded by wealth. What a sad testimony of a person who allowed the Word to be choked out.

You don’t have to be as rich and famous as Elvis for that to happen. If you love gold more than God, the Word will get choked out. For some of you, Jesus has become just one of several good interests in your life. Listen, friend, if Jesus is not Lord of all—His is not your Lord at all.

God’s word can be

### **3.3 Strangled by wants**

Jesus called these “pleasures.” It just means loving the things the world has to offer. One of the biggest enemies you’ll ever face in spiritual warfare is busyness. We all lead such busy, cluttered lives it’s hard to concentrate on the Word of God; and it’s getting harder. Life is getting more complicated. For instance, television used to consist of NBC, CBS or ABC. Now it’s a hundred other choices. It used to be “church” on Sunday; now other organizations and sports teams are even expecting you to be there while church is going on.

The sad thing about this attitude is that the hearer *really* wanted to receive the Word and be fruitful. He isn’t hard hearted, or shallow minded; he just got too busy. Is this person going to heaven? Probably. What’s the downside then? Look at Jesus’ observation in verse 14. “They do not mature.” A busy, distracted, over-extended Christian is doomed to a sad life of perpetual spiritual immaturity.

## **4. A TEACHABLE HEART: THE WORD IS SUCCESSFUL**

It doesn’t take a genius to figure out this fourth attitude is the ideal; it’s the goal for which every Believer should strive. Would you like to have an open, teachable heart? It doesn’t come automatically; it must be “cultivated.” Let’s talk about

## HOW TO CULTIVATE A TEACHABLE HEART

Unless you grew up on a farm, you may not know what the word *cultivate* means. It doesn't mean to plow, or plant or reap. According to the dictionary, cultivate means "to break up the surface soil around plants in order to destroy weeds, prevent crusting, and preserve moisture." That farming word has come to mean the development of any preference like, "I have cultivated a taste for classical music."

In order to be a good listener of the Word and have a teachable heart, that's something we must do. In Hosea 10:12, God says, "Reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until He comes and showers righteousness on you."

The other day, my wife was complaining to our yardman about the weeds in one of our gardens. She said to him, "David, (I'm our yardman) unless you get in there and remove those weeds, they are going to take over the garden." You don't have to intentionally plant weeds; they just grow on their own. You do have to intentionally remove them or they will choke out the good plants. So I got in there, and I dug out most of those weeds. Now weeds are living plants, and it's not that I hate weeds or anything; it's just that I love tomatoes, turnip greens and pole beans better. If you love the Word of God and the God of the Word supremely, you will be willing to cultivate a teachable attitude—by breaking up the hard soil of your heart.

Would you like to have a teachable heart that receives the Word of God like soft, fertile soil and produces a bumper crop of unfailing love? Here are four practical ways to cultivate this kind of attitude:

### **(1) Hunger for the Word!**

The Psalmist observed, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth." Psalm 119:105

Do you have a voracious appetite and desire to read and hear God's Word? Sadly, many of you are more interested in your next meal than you are in hearing from God. Do you have hobbies, activities or other things in your life you enjoy much more than hearing from God?

The French have an interesting phrase. When you sit down to eat a meal they say, "*bon appétit*," which means "good appetite." Why don't they say, "Good food?" Because they understand your enjoyment of a meal is directly related to the intensity of your appetite, not necessarily the quality of the food. If you haven't eaten in two days, a bowl of soup tastes heavenly. On the other hand, you can sit down to the finest meal prepared by the most talented chef but if you've just eaten three Big Macs, you won't really enjoy that fine meal. Why? Obviously, because you are already full.

You may not hunger for the Word of God, because you are already full of something else. So, let me ask you: How is your appetite for the Word of God? The reason some of you aren't really fed by the Word says much more about your lack of spiritual appetite than about the quality of the food. For example, a person who truly hungers for the word never asks on Saturday night, "Am I

going to church tomorrow?" That question is as superfluous as asking "Am I going to eat today?" If you hunger for the Word, your *only* question on Saturday night is "What time am I leaving for church?" You aren't coming because there is a new building; you come because you have a hunger for the Word. That kind of hunger must be cultivated intentionally.

## **(2) Hear the Word aggressively!**

At this moment, some of you are aggressively listening, and others are only passively hearing. For years, the RCA logo was a dog sitting in front of a gramophone with one ear cocked. The motto was "listening for his master's voice." Is that true of you? Do you read the Word or come to church and cock your ear heavenward to listen for the voice of your Master? Sadly, I look into the faces of people every Sunday who don't seem to be really listening for God. Some people come into church and cross their arms and put mental signs around their necks saying, "DO NOT DISTURB." That's why when Jesus finished the parable, He issued this challenge: He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (Luke 8:8) Huh? Didn't everybody there have ears? But not everyone who *can* hear really *listens* to God. In *The Message* paraphrase it reads: Jesus shouted, "Are you listening to this? REALLY listening?" Luke 8:8 *The Message*

Chuck Swindoll told this story: An Indian was walking in downtown New York City alongside a friend who was a resident of the city. Right in the center of Manhattan, the Indian seized his friend's arm and whispered, "Wait! I hear a cricket." His friend said, "Come on! This is downtown New York. You can't hear a cricket! There are taxis going by with their horns honking. The subway is roaring beneath us. You can't possibly hear a cricket!" The Indian insisted, "Wait a minute!" They stopped, and the Indian walked down to the end of the block, and there in a large cement planter where a tree was growing, he dug into the mulch and found the cricket. "See!" he yelled, as he held the insect high above his head. His friend walked over saying, "How in the world could you hear a cricket in the middle of downtown Manhattan?" The Indian said, "Well, it simply depends on what you're listening for. Here, let me show you." And he reached in his pocket and pulled out a handful of change—a couple of quarters, and three or four nickels and then he said, "Now watch." He held the coins waist high and dropped them to the sidewalk. Every head within a block turned around and looked in the direction of the coins. It all depends on what you're listening for.

When you are reading the Bible or hearing it taught, do you aggressively tune your ear to listen to God? There may be two of you sitting right next to each other in this room. One of you is saying, "Yes, Lord, I am hearing You!" The other is looking at your watch thinking, "When will this be over?" Are you *really* listening?

## **(3) Hang on to the Word!**

In verse 15, Jesus said a good listener not only *hears* the Word but also *retains* it. It's important to hang onto the word of God. There are two ways you can do it. First, you can work on memorizing passages of scripture. The Psalmist said, "I have hidden your Word in my heart that I might not sin against you." Psalm 119:11

Another way to retain the word is to take notes when you hear the Word taught. I have made it a practice for years of taking notes whenever I hear a message in person or on tape. I have notebooks full of sermon notes I've taken from other people. I can take out those notebooks and be blessed again and again by the word. Studies have shown that 24 hours after you hear something, you will only remember 10% of it (unless you take notes) then you will be able to recall over 40% of what you heard.

Einstein was correct when he said, "A short pencil is better than a long memory." If a doctor came into your hospital room after surgery, and said, "Okay, you are going home, but there are three things you need to do to get well," you'd be scrambling for a piece of paper and a pen to write it down.

That's a good way to hang on to the Word of God as well. It's more than simply filling in a few blanks. Try to write down everything helpful God reveals to you. It may be something totally different than what I'm saying! That's why a lot of people get cassette tapes or CDs of messages, so they can listen again and retain more of the word. These days you can read a written manuscript of all my messages by accessing our web site at [www.gabc.org](http://www.gabc.org). A teachable heart hears and retains the Word.

#### **(4) Help others hear the Word!**

Jesus said a teachable heart is like fertile soil that produces a crop that reproduces itself a hundredfold. Good soil not only produces crops, it produces more seed that can be replanted. Every summer I plant okra seeds because Cindy loves fried okra. I always have more than enough, so I keep the extra pods dry and then I get the seeds out of them to replant each summer.

One way to know for certain you have a teachable heart is when you are producing enough fruit to plant seeds of the Word yourself. Consider this beautiful picture from Psalms 126:6, "He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him." When you have a teachable heart, your heart is so broken for those who don't know Jesus you literally weep as you plant seeds of the word. Are you seed planter? Did you notice the farmer was so generous with his seed he didn't only plant the seed in the fertile ground? He tossed it everywhere, even knowing that only 25% of the seed would be successful.

The word of God is such a powerful force, you can just spread it around generously, don't be stingy with it. There are hundreds of ways to plant seeds, from passing out Bibles like the Gideons do, to sharing gospel tracts. Our women's ministry has a nice little tract you can leave with a tip at a restaurant—just make sure you leave a good tip with it! Sometimes when I'm on a plane I'll take the Airline magazine from the seat pocket and turn to some article like "How to make a million dollars before Friday" and I'll place a gospel tract there between the pages. I'm just planting seeds. I won't be a bit surprised to get to heaven and find somebody who says, "I was saved by reading a gospel tract I found on an airline flight!" Our television broadcast scatters seed all over East Texas. When you get tapes and CDs and give them to friends, you are scattering seeds.

I repeat, the best way to know when you have the right kind of heart is when you aren't only interested in hearing the Word; you are heeding the Word and helping others hear the Word.

## **CONCLUSION**

The seed of the Word is so powerful all you have to do is plant it—God will do the rest. Dr. Gaylord Kambarami is the General Secretary for the International Bible Society in Zimbabwe. Once he was passing out New Testaments and a very skeptical man told him if he took the Bible he would just tear the pages out and roll them up to make cigarettes. Dr. Kambarami told him to go ahead and do that, but to promise him he would read each page before he smoked it.

Years later, he met the man at a Christian convention. The scripture-smoking man had been saved and was now an evangelist himself. His testimony was simple. The man told how he had received a New Testament to make cigarettes. He said, "I smoked my way through Matthew, Mark, and Luke but when I got to John 3:16, I couldn't smoke anymore. When I read that I got on my knees and that's when Jesus changed my life!"

What kind of heart do you have today? Hardened? Shallow? Over-crowded? Will you make a new commitment today to cultivate your heart to become more teachable? Will you strive to be rooted deeply in the faith? Will you weed out some of the things that are strangling the Word in your life? Will you become someone who is actively planted the Word everywhere you go?

## OUTLINE

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2. A SHALLOW HEART: NO ROOT SO THE WORD IS STARVED
3. A CROWDED HEART: NO ROOM SO THE WORD IS STRANGLER
4. A TEACHABLE HEART: THE WORD IS SUCCESSFUL

## HOW TO CULTIVATE A TEACHABLE HEART

1. Hunger for the Word!

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2. Hear the Word aggressively!

3. Hang on to the Word!

"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." *Psalm 119:11 NIV*

4. Help others hear the Word!

"He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him."  
*Psalm 126:6 NIV*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes