

"Being Heart Healthy"

Matthew 13:1-23

(1) Oftentimes, Jesus spoke in parables.

(a) "The Gospels record some sixty different parables of Jesus, most of which are found in Matthew and Luke, fewer in Mark, and none in John" (Edwards 127).

(b) It has been estimated that at least 1/3 of Jesus' recorded teaching is found in the parables (Wiersbe, Windows on the Parables 15).

(c) A parable has been commonly defined as "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning."

(d) The word "parable" means "a placing of one thing beside another with a view to comparison" (Vine's Expository Dictionary).

(2) The purpose of His speaking in parables is describe in Matthew 13:10-17:

Most of the people that Jesus spoke to could not receive him or his message. One Biblical teacher wrote that: "It was only after one had accepted a teacher and his message that the teaching given in a particular parable became understandable" (Schubert 56).

The Parable of the sower. Expound on its meaning!

The primary teaching of this parable concerns how someone responds to the message of God's kingdom. But as we look at the principles in this passage we understand that we can apply this story to our own lives. **God's Word comes to us many times, and the potential of God's word is as great as it's source, but the condition of our heart will determine what happens to that Word.**

Right after Jesus told the parable, verse 9 tells us that Jesus called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." It is also very revealing Jesus told his disciples in verse 12, "Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him." How we listen and respond to God, as he speaks to us, will determine the amount of growth and spiritual fruit we will have. **Another way to say it is this, the condition of your heart will determine what God's Word can do in your life.**

At any time, our heart can take on one of the four characteristics (**Heart Conditions**) Jesus talks about in this parable.

Heart Conditions

The Hard Heart. Because life is hard and unfair, we can respond to life from a carnal mind-set and become, hard hearted. When other people attack you, malign you, abuse you, gossip about you, slander you, or hurt you, the natural response is to protect yourself. You will either rise up and lash back, recoil and put up a wall to shield yourself from continued attack or you will run in order to escape. Whether you rise up, recoil or run, you will have a tendency to hold on to the hurt and play back in your mind the scenes of attack and hear over and over again the hurtful words that were spoken. As you harbor those images and words, if you do not allow God to bring you healing and help, you can become hardened by bitterness. Through unforgiveness and resentment, you can become so hard that your heart is unresponsive to God's Word and your life never changes.

Heb 3:12-15 (NIV) 12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. 14 We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. **15 As has just been said: "Today, if**

you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."

The Uncommitted Heart. Another condition of the heart can be like the stony ground. Here the Word comes to the person but it does not have a lasting impact for there is no root that goes deep into their heart. This is the person that comes to church looking for an emotional lift. They hear the Word of God and they accept it with joy, but they don't do anything more with it after they leave the sanctuary. Jesus says, "They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away." (v.13) So many times I talk to people who are struggling with a decision or situations in their life and they complain that their faith seems dry. They say that church is no longer meeting their needs and they feel empty. Every time I ask the same question, "Are you reading your Bible?" Not once, have I ever had someone answer "Yes." If you are only fed or expect to be fed only on Sunday mornings, you will starve spiritually. You cannot feed your sinful nature six days a week and expect to hear from God and receive all you need from a 35 minute sermon. You might feel emotionally uplifted or awhile because God's Word is good every time you hear it, but you cannot live without getting rooted. You cannot have only head knowledge and emotional lifts, you must have a heart that is fertile and deep. Not shallow and rocky under the surface.

James 1:5-8 (NIV) 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. 6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. Someone who is double minded is struggling to make a commitment

Divided Heart. The third type of heart is the thorny heart. "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." (v. 14) This kind of heart is distracted and anxious. Instead of having their mind and heart devoted to pleasing God and pursuing righteousness, they are divided. Remember that Satan's battle cry is, "Divide and conquer." A divided mind and heart will always prevent God's Word from producing a bumper crop in your life. You need to ask yourself, "What is it that I'm really living for? Am I living for myself or for God? Am I in control or is God? Will I strive to meet my own needs or will I let God take control? Do I really trust God or my credit cards when trouble comes?" If our focus is on worldly wisdom, earthy pleasures and personal ambitions, then our heart is full of thorns and we will allow God's word to be choked out. **2 Timothy 4:10** "for Demas, because he love this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica..."

Titus 2:11-14 (NIV) 11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

The Healthy Heart. The fourth kind of heart is the spiritually receptive heart. **"But the seed on good soil stands for those with a good heart, who hear the word, retain it and by persevering produce a crop." (V.23)** The person with a good heart, hears the word, receives it, and applies it to their life and then receives a harvest of spiritual fruit. The heart that is like good soil is fertile ground for God to use. God wants to see His Word produce fruit in our lives. God wants to produce change and he desires to make your life fruitful and Christlike, but it all depends on the condition of your heart. Every time God's Word comes to you, either in church, through reading, on the radio or TV, in prayer or by some other means, as scripture reaches you, the condition of your heart will dictate how you will respond.

Jesus shows us that the Key identifier to knowing whether your heart is right or not is by what it produces.

Matthew 7: 16-21 (NIV)

16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. 21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Since God wants us to have a heart that is good soil for him to use, how can we cultivate a ready, rich heart of soil? In other words, how can we have a good heart for God to plant His Word in?

How do we have a Healthy Heart?

PLOW

The first thing to do in getting our heart ready, is to turn it over. How? Repent of any known sin. It is no mistake that the word repent means, "to turn." Repentance means to turn away from sin and pursue righteousness. To repent means that you make a 180 degree change in your direction. You don't say that you are sorry and you will try to do better, you confess that you have sinned and you need God's forgiveness and grace. In order to cultivate a heart that is noble and good, you need to plow up your heart and mind and turn control over to God. Ask God to break up the hard rocky surface of your heart and turn over the bitterness and unforgiveness that has made you unproductive and useless in the past.

Psalms 51:16-17 (NIV) 16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart,...**What we are talking about is prayer!**

PREPARE

The second step is to fertilize the soil. Spend time in God's Word so that the life-giving truth of scripture can soak deep into your heart. Meditate, as God told Joshua to do in **Joshua 1:8&9. Meditate day and night** so that the truth will saturate past your mind and flow into your heart. Allow the Bible to fill your heart and mind so that it permeates your thoughts and conversations. As you do this, you are literally washing away the negative, deadly ingredients that result in doubt, fear and defeat and they are replaced with faith, confidence and victory. It is just like washing soap from a milk jug. The only way to get all the soap out, is to allow fresh water to run continuously into the top until the soap is gone. Meditating on scripture is just like that. **Psalms 1!**

PLANT

The third step is to sow our obedience to God's Word into the situations of your life. We are commanded

to not be hearers only of God's Word, but a doer as well. If we want a harvest to take place, we must apply the truth of the Bible into our lives and do what it says. Remember, we will receive that which we have sown. **Galatians 6:7-9 instructs us, "7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. 9 Let us not become wearry in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."**

Apply God's Word to the things you face everyday. Look for what the Bible says about your situation and then follow the principals of scripture. In other words, put your faith into practice and live what scripture teaches. Don't just say you believe it, live it. **I love what Paul Harvey** said, "If you don't live it, you don't believe it."

Jesus said there were some conditions to consider! John 15:10 (NIV) 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. **John 15:14 (NIV)** 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. The Heart's soil needs to be in the right condition! **1 John 2:1,2, My little children I write these things so that you will not sin, but if..**

PROTECT

The fourth step is to weed the garden of your heart. **Prov 4:23 (NIV)** "23 Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." *Hebrew "nasar" means to "guard" or "protect."*

Guard your heart from the thorns of anxiety, worry and the cares of the world. As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, **Matthew 6:33 "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all other things will be added unto you."** Don't allow weeds of evil to grow, but remove them from your heart and life. Be careful what you watch, listen to and read. Protect your heart and your relationship with God. Keep the standard of holiness and purity always before you. With your eyes on God and your trust in Him, live to please and love him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. **2 Tim 2:22 (NIV)** *Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*

Protect your connection to Christ!

John 15:5-8 (NIV) 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Conclusion If we will plow, prepare, plant and protect our hearts, we will be ready soil that is good for God to use. And with good soil that is daily cultivated and ready to receive His Word, a harvest will be produced.