



GROW (UP)

Small Group Study Guide

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GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

THE SEED

Small Group Study Guide | March 31, 2024

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Today is Easter Sunday, also called Resurrection Sunday, when we celebrate Jesus' resurrection after His crucifixion and death. For Bible-based information on Christ's resurrection, see the Easter-related articles at gotquestions.org.

Discuss: Why do you think Jesus often used parables in His teaching?

Key Text: "Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. 2 And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 3 'Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow [seed].'" (Mark 4:1-3)

Today we begin a new series called "Grow (Up)" in which we'll study Jesus' parable known as "The Parable of the Sower" in Mark 4:1-20. Let's begin by defining what a parable is, why Jesus used parables, and why the "Parable of the Sower" is so important.

- **What is a parable?**

A parable is a short story with profound spiritual truth. A parable usually relates a common, familiar object such as a seed, or an event such as a wedding, or a fictitious person such as a rich but foolish man, to a deeper spiritual truth.

Discuss: Do you have a favorite parable of Jesus? If so, which one and why?

- **Why did Jesus teach in parables?**

Jesus used parables as a teaching aid. Three of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) record about thirty of Jesus' parables (there are no parables in the Gospel of John). In fact, for a season during His ministry, Jesus taught *only* in parables: "He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything" (Mk.4:34). While many people think Jesus spoke in parables to help unbelievers better understand spiritual truth, Jesus told His disciples: "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [unbelievers] it has not been given" (Mat.13:11). In other words, Jesus gave parables to instruct His disciples, not to convert unbelievers—because their hearts were closed toward God, unbelievers *could not* understand the symbolic meanings of the parables (Mk.4:12).

- **Why is the "Parable of the Sower" important?**

The Parable of the Sower is not only the very first parable Jesus used, but also the most important of all the parables! Jesus said that to understand all His parables, we must first understand this Parable of the Sower: "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?" (Mk.4:13). As we'll learn in our series, this foundational parable pictures the seed as God's Word (Mk.4:14), the soil as the human heart (Mk.4:13-20), and the sower as the Christian who shares God's Word with others (Mk.4:3; 1 Cor.3:6).

Discuss: Why do you think Jesus would say this "Parable of the Sower" is the most important of all the parables—we must understand it first to understand all the other parables (see Mark 4:13)?

1. The seed is the Word of God

The Bible is pictured by many symbols in Scripture. For example, David depicts God's Word as a lamp and a light (Ps.119:105), Jeremiah pictures God's Word as a fire and a hammer (Jer.23:29), Paul portrays God's Word as a sword (Eph.6:17), James illustrates God's Word as a mirror (Jms.1:23), and Peter describes God's Word as nourishing milk (1 Pet.2:2). In Mark 4:14, Jesus made it clear that the seed represents the Word of God: "The sower sows the word."

Discuss: According to Psalm 119:25, how does God's Word affect a person's life like a seed affects the ground?

2. Like a seed, God's Word has spiritual life in it.

A seed could not impart life if it was not first alive itself—a dead seed produces no life. Hebrews 4:12 describes God's Word as "living and active." The Bible is not a dead book that merely records historical people and events; rather, it is dynamic and productive, pulsating with spiritual energy! Because God is the "living God" (Heb.3:12), His Word is the living Word! 1 Peter 1:23 says, "You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God."

Discuss: In John 6:63, how did Jesus associate God's Word with life?

3. Like a seed, God's Word generates spiritual life, growth, and fruit.

When properly received by the soil, a seed generates life and growth. Similarly, when a person receives the Scripture into their heart with intention to obey, God's Word brings about spiritual life, growth, and fruit. Paul reminds us that God's Word is "at work in [us] believers" (1 Thess.2:13).

Discuss: According to 2 Timothy 3:15, how did the seed of God's Word bring about spiritual life in Timothy?

Discuss: According to 1 Peter 2:2, what role does God's Word play in a person's spiritual growth?

Discuss: According to these verses, what effects will God's Word have in our lives when we receive it properly: Psalm 19:7-8, 11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12?

Discuss: According to 2 Peter 1:19, what should our attitude be toward the Bible?

Discuss: In what ways has God's Word impacted your life?

For Further Study:

Free online study tools (commentaries, dictionaries, etc.) at blueletterbible.org

How to Listen to God by Charles Stanley

For Bible-based answers to questions about the Bible, go to gotquestions.org.

THE SOWER

Small Group Study Guide | April 7, 2024

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discuss: When have you shared the seed of God's Word with others? Tell about it.

Key Text: *"Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. 2 And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 3 'Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow [seed].'"*
(Mark 4:1-3)

Last Sunday we began a series called "Grow (Up)" in which we're studying Jesus' parable known as "The Parable of the Sower" in Mark 4:1-20. In last week's lesson, "The Seed," we learned several introductory truths including what a parable is, why Jesus taught in parables, and why Jesus said "The Parable of the Sower" is the most important of all His parables. (For information on all this, see last week's lesson of 3/31/24.) We also learned that the seed in the parable represents God's Word, and several ways the Bible is like a seed. In today's lesson, we'll focus on the sower in the parable.

1. Sowing the seed of God's Word is a partnership with God and other believers.

In 1 Corinthians 3:6, Paul describes himself as a sower of God's Word: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." Note that Paul describes evangelism (proclaiming the Good News of Jesus) as a partnership with other believers and God. While you may be the person who introduces the Gospel to someone and leads them to Christ all in one conversation, often a person's salvation decision is the result of a process in which we are each a link in the chain of several witnesses that leads to a person's faith-decision. One believer "plants the seed" by introducing the Gospel (v.6a), another believer "waters the seed" by providing additional information that helps the Gospel seed to take root (v.6b), and God gives "the growth" which leads to salvation (v.6c). Our goal as sowers is to faithfully share about Jesus (plant and/or water the seed)—that is, help the person get to their next step toward Him—and then leave the results to God. It is important to remember that we do the sharing, but only God can do the saving! Jesus emphasized this partnership principle when He taught about the harvest: "Others have labored...you have entered into their labor" (Jn.4:38).

Discuss: When have you seen a person's salvation (perhaps your own salvation) result from a variety of believers faithfully planting and watering the seed of God's Word in your life over time until God gave the increase?

2. Sowing the seed of God's Word requires passion.

Psalm 126:5-6 describes the passion of the believer who sows the seed of God's Word: "Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! 6 He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him."

Discuss: How can we increase our burden for those who don't know Christ and our passion for sowing the seed of God's Word?

3. Sowing the seed of God's Word requires patience.

Just as reaping a harvest requires patience from a farmer, the sower of God's Word must be patient as he awaits the harvest of the seed he has sown. James 5:7 says, "Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains." Keep being faithful to share the Gospel and trust God with the results.

Discuss: Who has God placed on your heart to share the Gospel with?

Discuss: Why is it often difficult to be patient as we await the lost to receive Christ?

4. God wants each of us to sow His Word in the way that fits the unique persons He made each of us to be.

God wants each of us to sow His Word in a way that fits the person He made each of us to be through our unique personalities, temperaments, and talents. As we learn from examples of believers in the New Testament who shared their faith, every Gospel conversation is different, so there is not a one-size-fits all method.

Discuss: Which of the following methods best describes your approach to sowing the seed—that is, sharing God's Word with others:

- By preaching / teaching God's Word with clarity—see Acts 2:14, 40-41.
- By building relationships that point people to Christ—see Matthew 9:9-12.
- By telling your personal testimony in a relatable way—see John 4:28-30; 9:25.
- By using your intellect in a reason-giving approach—see Acts 17:2-3.
- By meeting the needs of others in practical ways—see Acts 9:36-41; Mat.5:16.
- Are there other methods of sowing the seed of God's Word you can think of that are exemplified in Scripture?

Discuss: Which of the above methods of evangelism did God use to bring you to faith in Christ?

For Further Study:

Free online study tools (commentaries, dictionaries, etc.) at blueletterbible.org

To learn more about sharing your faith effectively, come to Grace Fellowship's Foundations Class "How to Share Your Faith" on the second Sunday of any month at 11:30 am in the Chapel. To register for the class, go to gograce.church/foundations.

Contagious Faith: Discover Your Natural Style for Sharing Jesus with Others by Mark Mittelberg

HARD HEART

Small Group Study Guide | April 14, 2024

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discuss: What are some causes and results of hard-heartedness toward God?

Key Text: *“And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it...13 And he said to them, ‘Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows the word. 15 And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.”* (Mark 4:4, 13-15)

In our final four lessons beginning today, we’ll consider the four types of soil—or conditions of the heart—Jesus describes in the parable:

- The Hard Heart (Mk.4:13-15)
- The Shallow Heart (Mk.4:5-6, 16-17)
- The Cluttered Heart (Mk.4:7, 18-19)
- The Receptive Heart (Mk.4:8-9, 20).

Jesus used soil to symbolize the human heart. Just as good soil will take full hold of a seed and produce a harvest, a heart that is open and receptive to God’s Word will take full hold of the message and a harvest of spiritual fruit will result. However, a heart that is not receptive toward God’s Word will not take in the seed and will bear no harvest (in the parable, Jesus describes three different kinds of unreceptive, unfruitful hearts). Note that the issue here is not the quality of the seed nor the quality of how the seed is sown (both are sufficient); rather, the focus is upon the condition of the soil—the heart’s response to the seed of God’s Word. This is why Jesus said this parable is the most important parable of them all (Mk.4:13): If a person does not first recognize from the parable that his heart is unreceptive to God’s Word and why, then no truth Jesus could further teach would matter since they won’t receive it. But if a person has a heart that is receptive to God’s Word, he can experience God’s supernatural harvest in his life.

Gardens or fields in Israel were marked off by footpaths. A sower would take a handful of seeds and fling them into the field. While the sower aimed for the fertile soil, some seed would inevitably fall on soil where it would not take root such as the hard footpath, or shallow, rocky ground, or patches of ground with weeds. In today’s text, we’ll study the first type of heart represented by the footpaths that separated the fields: the hard heart.

1. In a hard heart, the seed sits on the surface, but never enters the soil.

The hard ground represents a person who hears God’s Word but has no interest in it or is hard-hearted toward it. The seed sits on the surface and never enters the soil. So, Satan, like a bird, immediately plucks the message away (Mat.13:4), preventing the Word from taking root.

Discuss: According to Mark 16:14 and Hebrews 3:12-15, what words are associated with hard-heartedness?

2. A hard heart prevents God's Word from having effect in one's life.

The Word of God has supernatural power to transform us, but only if we receive it humbly and obediently. Jesus taught that the potential work of God's Word can be voided in a person's life when they replace it with human tradition. When speaking to the hard-hearted Pharisees, Jesus said, "You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men...13 thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down" (Mk.7:8,13). The Pharisees had constructed a body of religious tradition that they considered to be authoritative over Scripture, thus making the potential work God's Word void in their lives.

The Bible also teaches that when a hard-hearted person self-servingly strains an interpretation of Scripture to mean whatever they prefer it to mean, as opposed to its plain meaning, they make God's word void in their lives and bring about their own destruction. Peter describes "ignorant and unstable" people who "twist" the Scripture "to their own destruction" (2 Pet.3:16).

Discuss: How have you seen human traditions replace the authority of the Bible, thus making Scripture of no effect in the lives of people caught up in the traditions?

Discuss: In what ways have you seen self-serving misinterpretations of Scriptures make the Bible of no effect in the lives of those believing the misinterpretations?

3. A heart that is hard toward God and His Word is deceitful and destructive.

Throughout Scripture, the "heart" refers to the inward motivations that drive a person's thoughts, words, and actions. Jeremiah warns us of the unregenerated heart: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer.17:9). When our hearts are hard toward God, like the hard-as-concrete-pathway in the parable, we are easily deceived and are destined for destruction.

Discuss: Why is "just follow your heart" unwise, dangerous advice to give someone?

4. God gives us a new heart through Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

God promised to provide a new heart for us in Christ: "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ez.36:26). 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Romans 5:5 says, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

Discuss: In what ways has your heart—the inward motivations that drive your thoughts, words, and actions—changed since you received Christ?

For Further Study:

Free online study tools (commentaries, dictionaries, etc.) at blueletterbible.org

How to Listen to God by Charles Stanley

"What Does the Bible Mean by a 'New Heart'?" article at gotquestions.org

SHALLOW HEART

Small Group Study Guide | April 21, 2024

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discuss: Why do you think some people seem to start to follow Christ but then give up?

Key Text: *“Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away....16 And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. 17 And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.” (Mark 4:5-6, 16-17)*

We are learning in our “Grow (Up)” series on Jesus’ Parable of the Sower that the four types of soil mentioned in the parable represent four types of hearers of God’s Word. In today’s lesson, we’ll consider the shallow heart (Mk.4:16-17), which is represented by areas of the field where the soil was thin with a thick layer of rock underneath. At first, the seed seems to take root—the shoot springs up quickly—but since there is no root system and thus no water to nourish it, when the sun comes up the shoot is scorched and dies. The shallow soil symbolizes the person who hears God’s Word and seems to receive it at first but does not truly take it into their life. When tough times and persecution come (Mk.4:17), represented by the sun (Mt.13:5-6), the seed is burned and dies.

1. The shallow-hearted hearer did not have salvation and then lose it; rather, he never truly received salvation in the first place.

Jesus is not teaching that the shallow-hearted hearer received salvation and then lost it; rather, He is saying that the shallow-hearted hearer never truly received salvation to begin with—God’s Word never took root and thus was never given opportunity to do its life-regenerating work. When the Gospel takes root in a person’s life, God performs several irreversible, securing actions in the believer’s life. The believer:

- Becomes a new creation which can never be destroyed (2 Cor.5:17),
- Experiences redemption which can never be revoked (Titus 2:14),
- Experiences justification which can never be reversed (Rom.5:1),
- Is sealed with the Holy Spirit which can never be broken (Eph.1:13),
- Is promised eternal life which can never be rescinded (Jn.10:28-29),
- Is given salvation as a gift which can never be withdrawn (Rom.6:23),
- Is guaranteed glorification which can never be cancelled (Rom.8:30).

The shallow-hearted hearer who falls away (Mk.4:17) is an example of the person John describes in 1 John 2:19: *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”*

Discuss: How do these verses highlight the eternal security of a person who truly receives and believes God’s Word: John 3:16, 18; Romans 8:1, 38-39; Jude 1:24-25?

2. The true believer is rooted, built up, and established in Christ.

Not only does the Bible describe a true believer as a person who receives God's Word and allows it to take root in their life, but it also describes the true believer as being rooted, built up, and established in Christ: "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith..." (Col.2:6-7). Let's take a closer look at these helpful phrases that come from the worlds of agriculture, architecture, and law:

- **Agricultural Analogy: In Christ, we are like a tree permanently rooted:**
"rooted...in him" (Col.2:7a). The word "rooted" speaks of being firmly fixed and permanently grounded in Christ. Note that it indicates a past action that has continuing effect, meaning that we have been rooted and will always continue to be rooted in Christ since nothing can separate us from Him!

Discuss: How does Jesus describe our rootedness in Him in John 15:1-11?

- **Architectural Analogy: In Christ, we are like a building continually rising:**
"...built up in him" (Col.2:7b). Because we are permanently rooted in Christ, we are now able to be built up in Christ like a building continuously rising. The phrase "built up" indicates that it is currently and continually being built up. As we cooperate with the Lord's work in us, we grow and rise toward maturity.

Discuss: How does Peter describe our being built in Christ in 1 Peter 2:4-5?

- **Law Analogy: In Christ, we are like a law that has been forever ratified:**
"...established in the faith" (2:7c). The word "established" was used when a law was firmly decided upon and approved. Not only are we like a tree rooted firmly and permanently in Christ, and a building rising continuously, but we are also approved by God—it has been decided and authorized by Him that we are saved and eternally established. Note that the emphasis in all three-word pictures in v.7 is on what God does in and for us, not on anything we've done for God.

Discuss: What does Philippians 1:6 teach about God's work in us?

3. A faith that can't be tested can't be trusted.

Note that it was the "heat" of tribulation and persecution that caused the shallow-hearted person to fall away (4:17). Rather than fearing these tests of our faith, James 1:2-4 tells us to rejoice in them because they reveal the genuineness of our faith and give our faith a chance to grow: "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." God will use our trials not to destroy our faith, but to develop our faith when our heart's soil is open and receptive to Him and His Word.

Discuss: When has your faith grown because of a tough time you went through?

For Further Study:

Free online study tools (commentaries, dictionaries, etc.) at blueletterbible.org

What's Good about Feeling Bad? by John Thomas and Gary Habermas

"Why Does God Allow Us to Go through Trials?" article at gotquestions.org

CLUTTERED HEART

Small Group Study Guide | April 28, 2024

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discuss: : What are the top 2-3 things that hinder you from God's Word?

Key Text: *"Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain...18 And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." (Mark 4:7, 18-19)*

The four types of soil Jesus mentions in His Parable of the Sower represent four types of hearers of God's Word. We've seen the hard-hearted hearer whose problem was a lack of interest (Mk.4:13-15) and the shallow-hearted hearer whose problem was a lack of depth (Mk.4:16-17). In today's lesson, we'll consider the cluttered-heart hearer whose heart is described as thorny ground where a seed is choked to death (Mk.4:18-19). Jesus describes three different kinds of thorns that choke the seed of God's Word and prevent it from bearing fruit in the life of a cluttered-heart hearer.

1. The thorns of worry choke and kill the seed of God's Word.

"But the cares of the world...choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." (Mk.4:19a)

Worry, or "the cares of this world" (v.19a) is often the result of looking at our circumstances or ourselves rather than keeping our eyes focused on Jesus. Many of us have experienced these damaging consequences of worry in our lives:

- Sorrow from focusing on our past failures,
- Anxiety from focusing on our present circumstances,
- Fear from focusing on the unknown future.

The late Corrie ten Boom, holocaust survivor and Christian author and speaker, said it well: "If you look at the world, you'll be distressed; if you look within, you'll be depressed; but if you look at God you'll be at rest." The writer of Psalm 123:1 had the right focus: *"To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!"* For the believer who is tempted to worry, the best place to look is not at the world, at others, at our circumstances, or at ourselves. The best and only place to look is up!

In the Old Testament, Israel's King Jehoshaphat was concerned because three nations had joined forces against him. He didn't know what to do, so he prayed to God, saying: *"our eyes are on you"* (2 Chron.20:12). The Lord immediately answered and gave him victory. We serve the same God who wants us to look to Him: *"I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? 2 My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth"* (Ps.121:1-2).

Discuss: Why is worry is such an obstacle to God's Word having effect in our lives?

Discuss: How do these verses address worry: Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 4:6-7?

2. The thorns of the deceitfulness of riches choke and kill God's Word.

"But the...deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." (Mk.4:19b)

The consuming desire for money and the power it brings has brought down the lives of countless people, including many who at one time professed faith in Christ. Paul warns us: *"Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs"* (1 Tim.6:9-10). A heart that is crowded with greed and the desire for riches has no room in it for the Word of God. If God chooses to bless a believer with material wealth, he must be careful to view it as a divine stewardship and an opportunity for ministry.

Discuss: What warnings about wealth are highlighted in these verses: Proverbs 15:6; 23:4; Ecclesiastes 5:10; Matthew 6:19-20?

3. The thorns of desiring things instead of God choke and kill God's Word.

"But the...desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." (Mk.4:19c)

God's Word has effect in our lives only when we have first submitted our lives to Him. If *"other things enter in"* (v.19c) and crowd out God's Word, we cannot experience God's work in us or through us. The only preventative measure we can take to keep room in our hearts for God's Word is to put God first—that is, to give Him top priority over everything else in our lives. Jesus summarized this "God-first" attitude in Matthew 22:37: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."* This means that all that we are, all that we have, and all that we hope to be is totally invested in our relationship with God. We hold nothing back. In Matthew 6:33, Jesus says, *"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."*

Discuss: What was the problem with the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:4?

Discuss: What *"other things enter in"* (Mk.4:19) and distract you in your relationship with God? What steps can you take to put those "other things" in their proper place?

Discuss: How do these verses highlight putting God first: 1 John 5:21; Romans 12:1?

Discuss: Which of the three thorns we've learned about today from The Parable of the Sower do you struggle with the most? Why?

For Further Study:

Free online study tools (commentaries, dictionaries, etc.) at blueletterbible.org

How to Listen to God by Charles Stanley

"What Does the Bible Say about Worry?" article at gotquestions.org

RECEPTIVE HEART

Small Group Study Guide | May 5, 2024

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discuss: What does a life that has received the seed of God's Word look like?

Key Text: *"And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold. 9 And he said, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear...20 But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.'" (Mark 4:8-9, 20)*

This is the final lesson in our "Grow (Up)" series in which we're studying Jesus' "Parable of the Sower." We've learned that the four types of soil Jesus mentions represent four kinds of hearts and how each respond to the seed of God's Word. Tragically, three of the four are unreceptive—the hard heart lacks interest (Mk.4:13-15), the shallow heart lacks depth (Mk.4:16-17), and the cluttered heart lacks room for the seed (Mk.4:18-19). We know that none of the people symbolized by these three types of soil experienced salvation since the evidence of salvation is fruit and none of them bore any fruit at all: *"You will recognize them by their fruits"* (Mat.7:16). This reminds us that salvation does not come by simply listening to the Word (hard heart), or through an emotional response to the Word (shallow heart), but by fully receiving the Word through total trust in God: *"You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God"* (1 Pet.1:23).

In contrast to the previous three types of hearts, the receptive heart is interested in the Word (unlike the hard heart) and accepts and keeps the Word (unlike the shallow and crowded hearts). The main difference between the receptive heart and the other types of hearts is the receptive heart leads to fruitfulness (Mk.4:8, 20). In Galatians 5:22-23, the Bible mentions nine different kinds of fruit of the Spirit, or Christlike characteristics, produced by the Holy Spirit in a life that has received the seed of God's Word.

1. **Love:** *"The fruit of the Spirit is love..."* (Gal.5:22a) – This is the Holy Spirit-produced selfless love which Jesus taught and demonstrated that sacrifices for the good of others.

Discuss: How is the fruit of the Spirit of love described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8?

2. **Joy:** *"The fruit of the Spirit is...joy"* (Gal.2:22b) – This is a Holy Spirit-produced deep, inner contentment rooted in trust in God—a settled delight in God that abides despite outward circumstances.

Discuss: How is the fruit of the Spirit of joy described in 1 Peter 1:8?

3. **Peace:** *"The fruit of the Spirit is...peace"* (Gal.2:22c) – This is a Holy Spirit-produced calm, tranquil spirit that is rooted in a right relationship with God and a trust in Him as sovereign over all things.

Discuss: How is the fruit of the Spirit of peace described in Philippians 4:7?

4. **Patience:** “*The fruit of the Spirit is...patience*” (Gal.5:22d) – This is a Holy Spirit-produced ability to hold one’s temper for a long time while enduring pain and suffering—whether from people or circumstances—without complaining.

Discuss: How is the fruit of the Spirit of patience described in Ephesians 4:2?

5. **Kindness:** “*The fruit of the Spirit is...kindness*” (Gal.5:22e) – This is a Holy Spirit-produced ability to put tender concern for others into practical action.

Discuss: How is the fruit of the Spirit of kindness described in Ephesians 4:32?

6. **Goodness:** “*The fruit of the Spirit is...goodness*” (Gal.5:22f) – This is a Holy Spirit-produced moral and spiritual uprightness of heart and life that involves being good for God’s glory and the benefit of others—not to attain superior self-righteousness.

Discuss: How is the fruit of the Spirit of goodness described in Galatians 6:10?

7. **Faithfulness:** “*The fruit of the Spirit is...faithfulness*” (Gal.5:22g) – This is a Holy Spirit-produced ability to be dependable, trustworthy, steadfast, and loyal.

Discuss: How is the fruit of the Spirit of faithfulness described in Luke 16:10?

8. **Gentleness:** “*The fruit of the Spirit is...gentleness*” (Gal.5:23a) – This is a Holy Spirit-produced humility and thankfulness toward God, and polite, restrained behavior toward others.

Discuss: How is the fruit of the Spirit of gentleness described in Galatians 6:1-2?

9. **Self-Control:** “*The fruit of the Spirit is...self-control*” (Gal.5:23b) – This is a Holy Spirit-produced power to restrain our baser thoughts, desires, words, and actions.

Discuss: How is the fruit of the Spirit of self-control described in 2 Timothy 1:7?

Discuss: In which of the nine fruit of the Spirit have you experienced the most growth recently? Which of the nine do you currently need to grow in the most?

Discuss: Look up these passages that highlight other fruit in a Christian’s life and discuss how each fruit can be displayed in a believer’s daily life:

- **The Fruit of Sanctification (growth in holiness):** Romans 6:22
- **The Fruit of Righteousness (growth in reliance upon and enjoyment of the benefits of knowing Christ):** Philippians 1:11
- **The Fruit of Good Works (growth in actions rooted in faith):** Colossians 1:10
- **The Fruit of Praise (growth in acknowledging God’s greatness and goodness):** Hebrews 13:15

For Further Study:

Free online study tools (commentaries, dictionaries, etc.) at blueletterbible.org

The Fruitful Life by Jerry Bridges

“What is the Fruit of the Holy Spirit?” article at gotquestions.org



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