

HOW RECEPTIVE ARE YOU?

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Text: Matthew 13:18-23

■ President Franklin D. Roosevelt got tired of smiling that big smile and saying the usual things at all those White House receptions. So, one evening he decided to find out whether anybody was paying attention to what he was saying. As each person came up to him with extended hand, he flashed that big smile and said; "I murdered my grandmother this morning." People would automatically respond with comments such as "How lovely!" or "Just continue with your great work!" Nobody listened to what he was saying, except one foreign diplomat. When the president said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning," the diplomat responded softly, "I'm sure she had it coming to her."

--James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988), p. 318.

Let's face it many people do not listen. Maybe they are preoccupied, maybe they are tired, maybe they're not even interested—whatever the case, when a person does not listen he/she is missing something. And when it's the Word of God, that person is missing something very important.

As we look at this parable of the sowers, it is important to remember how important the process of hearing is—that is in the sense of receiving and understanding. In addition, we must take into account the type of people that are represented in this parable in the form of ground or soil types.

Notice the types of ground or if you will the personality *types* that we can see in this parable.

I. THE UNCONCERNED HEARER represented by “the pathway” (v. 19)

■ *“When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.”* Matthew 13:19 NIV

A. He is preoccupied with too many things.

The word never takes root because it is never taken to heart.

■ The words "in his heart" make the heart the place of decision, the center of personality (see on 5:8). Kingsbury (*Parables*, p. 55) is wrong to conclude from this that the person in view actually becomes a Christian and church member and then rejects the message. He argues that the words "when anyone hears the message about the kingdom" is "tantamount to saying that he becomes a Christian." The conclusion is untenable if one considers the next words: "and does not understand it" (cf. the same verbs in vv. 13-14). EBC

B. There is easy access to his undisciplined mind.

■ Jesus' interpretation is clear. Some people hear the message about the kingdom; but like hardened paths, they do not let the truth penetrate, and before they really understand it the devil has snatched it away. EBC

■ The receiving of the Word consist of two parts: attention of mind and intention of will. -- William Ames, *Leadership*, Vol. 8, no. 3.

II. THE EMOTIONAL HEARER represented by “the stony or rocky ground” (vv. 20-21).

■ *The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. Matthew 13:20 NIV*

A. He values what he feels and what he sees above all else; therefore, he has no depth.

B. He is offended as quickly as he received—he is ruled by his emotions.

■ Verse 21 of our text states, *“But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.”* (NIV)

■ One day my three-year-old granddaughter, Beverly, was playing with her toys. Her mother, who was folding laundry across the room, noticed Beverly's shirt was dirty and needed to be changed. After calling two times with no response, her mother gave her the full three-name call: "Beverly Elizabeth Provost, did you hear me?" Beverly answered, "Yes, Mama. **My ears did, but my legs didn't.**"

-- Marguerite Provost, Georgia. Today's Christian Woman, "Small Talk."

III. THE WORLDLY-MINDED HEARER represented by “the thorny ground” (v. 22).

■ *“The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.”* Matthew 13:22 (NIV)

A. He is worried, anxious and covetous.

He is worried about what might happen to what he's trying to get if he ever gets it.

The idea is clear: worries about worldly things or devotion to wealth (cf. 1Tim 6:9) snuff out spiritual life. If "deceit" is understood, there is an added warning that these "thorns" are so subtle that one may not be aware of the choking that is going on. The warning is timeless.

B. He is deceived in his thinking and therefore can never be fruitful.

■ A school teacher lost her life savings in a business scheme that had been elaborately explained by a swindler. When her investment disappeared and her dream was shattered, she went to the Better Business Bureau. "Why on earth didn't you come to us first?" the official asked. "Didn't you know about the Better Business Bureau?" "Oh, yes," said the lady sadly. "I've always known about you.

But I didn't come because I was afraid you'd tell me not to do it." The folly of human nature is that even though we know where the answers lie—God's Word--we don't turn there for fear of what it will say. Jerry Lambert

IV. THE SPIRITUALY- MINDED HEARER represented by “the good ground” (v. 23).

■ *“But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.” Matthew 13:23 (NIV)*

A. He “hears” the word.

Notice the process. He hears, he understands and he produces. But it all begins with the act of hearing in a receptive manner and acting on that which has been received into one's heart.

B. He “understands” the word.

■ Eugene Lowry gave this advice to young preachers:

I try to teach my students how to trick themselves into hearing. You have to be out of control. When you're in the driver's seat, it doesn't work. It doesn't matter where I open this thing up, I already have my theology. I just superimpose it. I don't tell the folks I do; I just do it so automatically I don't even notice. So you have to trick yourself to get out of control.

One of the things I tell my students at Saint Paul is sometimes to take a text that you're hoping to use in a sermon, underline all the important parts, and then look at what you did not underline. That's where God may speak. The Spirit may get real active at the point of confusion or at what we don't notice.

If it's a narrative with several characters, find out with whom you're identifying. Then put yourself in somebody else's shoes, and see if the Lord might speak.

-- Eugene Lowry, "Listening to the Dark," Preaching Today, Tape No. 125.

C. He bears fruit.

■ The fruit of the Spirit grows only in the garden of obedience.

-- Terry Fullam, Leadership, Vol. 6, no. 3.

■ James said in James 1:21, "Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly *accept the word planted in you*, which can save you." (NIV) bold italics added

CONCLUSION

■ In The Last Days Newsletter, Leonard Ravenhill tells about a group of tourists visiting a picturesque village who walked by an old man sitting beside a fence. In a rather patronizing way, one tourist asked, "Were any great men born in this village?"

The old man replied, "Nope, only babies." A frothy question brought a profound answer. There are no instant heroes—whether in this world or in the kingdom of God. Growth takes time, and as I Timothy 3:6 and 5:22 point out, even spiritual leadership must be earned.

William C. Shereos

The problem is that the unconcerned hearer, the emotional hearer and the worldly-minded hearer **never take the time to cultivate their spiritual experience with God.** Spiritual growth takes time and without it we will not endure. Although these personality *types* are common, the person can be changed through the power of the Holy Spirit and a disciplined mind.

