

QUESTION: How do you have good soil and an open heart to receive God's word, instead of it falling on rocks, growing and being parched by the sun and withering?

ANSWER: This is from the parable of the Sower, which can be found in Matt. 13:3-23, Mark 4:2-20, and Luke 8:4-15. "But the ones that fell on the **good ground** are those who, **having heard the word** with a **noble and good heart**, keep it and bear fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15). The Bible compares our hearts to either good or bad ground (soil), in which the seed of God's word will be planted (sowed). First of all, this parable is talking about when the gospel is preached to the unsaved, and how the word of God will bring forth fruit in some lives and not in others, but it also has a lesson for us as Christians. I believe the Bible teaches that **WE are responsible for the CONDITION of our own hearts**, or "ground" in which the word of God is planted as we grow and mature in our Christian walk.

- **Read Luke 8:4-15** "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. Some fell on rocky soil; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold....." (Verses 12-15) "Now the parable is this: **The SEED is the WORD of GOD**. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away **the word out of their HEARTS**, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation (testing) **FALL AWAY**. And the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the ones that fell on the **good ground** are those who, **having heard the word** with a **NOBLE and GOOD HEART**, keep it and bear fruit with patience."

What does it mean to have a "noble and good" heart? I do **not** believe it means that some of us just have more capacity to believe God than others, and too bad for the rest. I believe it means each of us must **work on our own hearts** to **MAKE SURE** that they are good ground! Just as a farmer has to plow up the ground in order to allow the seeds to sprout, and water the crop, and later he has to pull the weeds that come up, we must be diligent to keep our hearts in tune with God. The worst thing we can do is to harden our hearts by being stubborn, disobedient and full of pride, so that the seed of the word of God cannot be planted and grow. The following are some things you can do to affect your heart positively, and some things to avoid that will affect you negatively: **AFFECTING YOUR HEART POSITIVELY -**

1.) Make A Decision to Be Good Ground - Making the decision to **BE** good ground is the first and most important thing you can do. **Submit yourself to God**, yield your self will, humble yourself, present your body as a living sacrifice, and **give up your free will to Him**.

- **Exodus 35:5,21,29 & 36:2** "Take from among you an offering to the Lord. Whoever is of a **WILLING HEART**, let him bring it....." "And they came, everyone **whose HEART stirred him up**, and every one **whom his (own) spirit made willing**, and brought the Lord's offering..." "Every man and woman **whose HEART made them willing....**" "....every one **whose HEART stirred him up** to come unto the work to do it."
- **Acts 17:11** "These were more **NOBLE** than those in Thessalonica, in that **they RECEIVED the WORD with all readiness**, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so."

- **Daniel 10:12** ".....'Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you **SET YOUR HEART** (made a decision) on understanding this and on **HUMBLING yourself before your God**, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words (prayer)."

2.) Confess & Turn Away from Sin (Break Up the Old Ground) - It is sin and carelessness that hardens our hearts, so confession of sin and **repentance will BREAK UP that hardened ground**, and make the heart **receptive** to God's word again. Proverbs 20:9 says, "Who can say, '**I have made my HEART CLEAN**, I am pure from my sin?'" It is true that we ourselves cannot make our hearts clean, but the blood of Jesus, which we can appropriate by faith, will cleanse us from ALL sin. A daily inventory of prayerful self-examination such as in Step 10 is needed to find the areas of "fallow ground" that need to be broken up.

- **Jeremiah 4:3-4 & 14** "For thus says the Lord.....'Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns." Vs. 14 "**Wash your HEART** from wickedness..."
- **Hosea 10:12** "Sow with a view to righteousness, reap in accordance with kindness; **break up your fallow ground**, for it is time to seek the Lord until He comes to rain righteousness on you."

Definition: Fallow Ground - A field plowed up and left for seeding, particularly a field left to rest for a year or more. Our hearts, if left to themselves (lying fallow) will become hardened. We must PLOW UP the ground, PULL UP the weeds, and PLUCK OUT the thorns.

- **I Corinthians 11:28 & 31** "But **let a man EXAMINE himself**, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup." "For if we would **judge ourselves** (examine ourselves and then REPENT), we would not be judged."
- **James 4:8** "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and **PURIFY your HEARTS**, you double-minded."
- **Psalms 51:3, 10 & 17** "For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me." "Create in me a **CLEAN HEART**, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." ".....a broken and a contrite HEART, O God, you will not despise."
- **II Chronicles 30:18-19** "....but Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, 'May the good Lord provide atonement for **everyone who PREPARES his HEART to seek God....**'"
- **Proverbs 20:9** "Who can say, 'I have **made my HEART CLEAN**, I am pure from my sin?'"
- **I John 1:7-9** "....the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and **to CLEANSE us** from all UNRIGHTEOUSNESS."
- **Acts 15:7-9** ".....the Gentiles hear the word of the gospel and believe. So **God, who knows the HEART**, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit..... **PURIFYING their HEARTS by faith.**"
- **Psalms 139:23-24** "Search me, O God, and **KNOW my HEART**; try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."
- **Jeremiah 17:9-10** "**The HEART is deceitful** (full of denial) above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I the Lord **SEARCH the HEART....**" Also read Ezek. 36:25-27; Joel 2:12-13; Psalm 147:3; Isaiah 57:15; Deut. 30:1-2 & 6; Ezek. 44:9; Romans 2:29; Deut. 10:12, 16; Colossians 2:11 & 13

3.) Establish Your Heart in God's Word - Allow the seed of God's word to be planted in your heart, and **meditate on God's word** to "water" the seed. Do not be double-minded (having a "divided heart") by paying attention to philosophies and ideas that are contrary to God's word. A successful farmer knows that he can only plant one kind of seed in his field at a

time. If he wants a harvest of wheat, he can only plant wheat seeds. Proverbs 4:23 says, "**Keep your HEART with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.**" This means that the harvest that grows out of your heart, from what you have planted in it, is the most important thing in your life, and will shape and direct every "issue" in your life. **You must keep, GUARD, and WATCH OVER your HEART** to keep it firmly established in God's word, and to keep OUT any weeds.

- **Psalm 112:1 & 7-8** "...Blessed is the man that fears the Lord, that **delights greatly in His commandments (WORD)** . He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: **his HEART is FIXED**, trusting in the Lord. **His HEART is ESTABLISHED**, he shall not be afraid..."
- **Hebrews 13:9** "Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the HEART to be ESTABLISHED with [God's] grace."
- **Hosea 10:2** "**Their HEART is DIVIDED**; now they are held guilty. He will break down their altars...."
- **Proverbs 23:26** "My son, **give me your HEART**, and let your eyes observe My ways."
- **Proverbs 4:4, 20-21 & 23** "...**let your HEART retain My WORDS**; keep my commandments and live." "My son, give attention to My words;....do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them **in the MIDST of your HEART.**" "**Keep (guard, watch over) your HEART** with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."
- **Psalm 119:11** "**Your WORD I have hidden in my HEART** that I might not sin against You."
- **Matthew 12:34-35** "....for out of **the abundance of the HEART** the mouth speaks. A good man out of the GOOD TREASURE of his HEART brings forth good things...."
- **John 15:7** "If you abide in Me, and **My WORDS abide in you**, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you."
- **Isaiah 51:7** "Hearken unto Me, you that know righteousness, the people **in whose HEART is My law** (God's word)."
- **Deuteronomy 11:18** "Therefore shall you **lay up these My WORDS in your HEART** and in your SOUL..."
- **Psalm 19:8 & 14** "The statutes of the Lord are right, **rejoicing the HEART**, the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." "Let the words of my mouth, and **the meditation of my HEART** be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord."
- **Psalm 86:11** "Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; **UNITE my HEART** to fear Your name."

AFFECTING YOUR HEART NEGATIVELY -

1.) Through Negligence and Carelessness - Spiritual laziness, failure to "take heed" (pay attention) to the word of God, failure to "be sober, and be vigilant." It is also **neglecting to pull the weeds in the garden of your heart** until they choke out the word. It is allowing your heart to be overburdened or weighed down with the cares of this world.

- **Luke 21:34-36** "But take heed to yourselves, lest **your HEART** be weighed down with carousing (partying), drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. **Watch therefore, and pray always** that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."
- **Hebrews 2:1, 3 & 12** "For this reason **we must pay much closer attention** to what we have heard (God's word), lest we **drift away** from it." "How shall we escape **if we NEGLECT** so great a salvation?" "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you **an evil, unbelieving HEART**, in falling away from the living God."

- **I Peter 5:8-9** "Be sober, **be VIGILANT**; because your adversary (enemy) the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom (looking for someone) he may devour. RESIST him, steadfast in the faith..."

2.) Through Hardening Your Heart - This is more deliberate than just negligence. This is when you hear God's word, but deliberately disregard or disobey what it says, and by so doing you **resist and grieve the Holy Spirit**. If a person continues to be rebellious and disobey God, their HEART gradually becomes more and more hardened.

- **Exodus 8:15** "But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, **he hardened his HEART** and did not listen to them, as the Lord had said."
- **Hebrews 2:13-19** "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' lest any one of you be **HARDENED by the deceitfulness of sin**.....Today, if you hear His voice, **do not harden your hearts**.....And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to **those who were disobedient**? And so we see that they were not able to enter (the Promised Land) **because of unbelief**."
- **Psalms 95:7b-10** "...Today, if you will hear His voice: '**Do not HARDEN your HEARTS**, as in the **REBELLION**, and as in the day of trial in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me; they proved Me, though they saw My work. For forty years **I was grieved** with that generation, and said, 'It is a people who **go astray in their HEART**, and they do not know My ways.'"

3.) Through Inclining Your Heart to Evil - This means **to desire and set your affection** on wrong things. Satan's original temptation to Eve was that she was missing something by not experiencing evil, and she began to LOOK at the tree and DESIRE it (she inclined her heart toward it). David prays to God in Psalm 144:4, "Do not incline my heart to any evil thing," but **it is really not God who does the inclining, but we ourselves**. This was David's way of saying, "God, please help me to not desire evil things!" We also must ask God for the strength to turn away from evil.

- **Genesis 3:6** "When the woman **SAW** that the tree was good for food, and that it was **a delight to the eyes**, and that the tree was **DESIRABLE** to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate."
- **Acts 8:21-23** "You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for **your HEART is not RIGHT** in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your **wickedness**, and pray God if perhaps **the thought of your HEART** may be forgiven you. For I see that **you are poisoned by bitter envy** and in bondage to iniquity (sin)."
- **Psalms 141:4** "Do not **incline my HEART to any evil thing**, to practice deeds of **wickedness** with men who do iniquity; and do not let me eat of their delicacies."

Let's look at an example of this from God's word, from the life of King Solomon. In the earlier part of his life, Solomon inclined his heart towards God and kept His commandments. Later in life, **he disobeyed God** by marrying many foreign wives who worshiped idols and false gods. His DESIRE for all these women, and his relationships with them, **began to turn his heart away** from the one true God, until Solomon himself was participating in the worship of their heathen idols.

Early in Solomon's Life -

- **I Kings 8:54-61** "And it came about that when **Solomon had finished praying** this entire prayer and supplication to the Lord, he arose from before the altar of the Lord, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread toward heaven. And he stood and blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice saying, 'Blessed be the Lord, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised; not one word

has failed of all His good promise, which He promised through Moses His servant. May the Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers; may He not leave us or forsake us, **that He may INCLINE our HEARTS to Himself**, to walk in all His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His ordinances....." **"Let your HEART** therefore be wholly devoted to the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments, as at this day."

Later In Solomon's Life -

- **I Kings 11:1-9** "Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the sons of Israel, 'You shall not associate with them, neither shall they associate with you, for **they will surely TURN your HEART away after their gods.**' Solomon held fast to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and **his wives TURNED his HEART AWAY**. For it came about when Solomon was old, his wives **turned his HEART away after other gods; and his HEART was not wholly (completely) devoted to the Lord his God**, as the heart of David his father had been.....and Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not follow the Lord fully.....Now the Lord was angry with Solomon because **his HEART was turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel**, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but **he did not observe (obey) what the Lord had commanded.**"