

Jesus' Parable of the Fruitful Heart  
Luke 8:1-15  
Key Verse: 8:15

by Steve Stasinos

"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."

My key verse this year is Genesis 1:28. I chose this key verse because I want to receive God's blessing and be fruitful. Everyone wants to live a fruitful life. In this parable, Jesus teaches us that a fruitful life begins by hearing the word of God. But what determines the outcome is the condition of our heart. How is your heart this morning? Let's learn to be those with a fruitful heart that pleases Jesus.

First, community of the kingdom of God (1-3). Look at verse 1a. "After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God." Jesus performed many miracles and taught many things during his ministry. But his focus was proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. What is the good news of the kingdom of God? In the event leading up to this passage, Jesus had told a sinful woman, "Your sins are forgiven (7:48)." This is what people really needed to know. This is good news. Jesus came to forgive our sins and restore the kingdom of God in our hearts. To receive this good news, we must repent and believe Jesus' words (Mk 1:15).

Where Christ reigns, people are changed, and a community of the kingdom forms. Look at those who followed Jesus. Verses 1b-3 read, "The Twelve were with him, 2and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; 3Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means." In that ultra-conservative Jewish society, this community looked strange: Twelve unemployed men being supported by working women. In Jesus there is no gender barrier, but both men and women serve God, growing together. This was God's original intention when he created man both male and female (Ge 1:27). But Luke emphasizes the sacrifice of these women. They had all received Jesus' grace. Mary had been healed from perpetual demon possession. Joanna was healed from enduring Herod's awful parties. And there were many others. In response they sacrificially served Jesus' ministry. They washed and repaired clothing, cooked meals, provided lodging and cleaned up after the disciples.

Then and now the sacrificial lives of changed women is crucial to the community of the kingdom of God. I am thankful to serve God full time, but this would be impossible without my wife's sacrificial support. On all our campuses women serve God and our community so sacrificially, starting from Mother Barry. Even though she broke her shoulder, she entertains guests in her home, and even helped me prepare this message. They do so simply from love and gratitude to Jesus. Their radical devotion to Jesus makes a beautiful community of the kingdom of God. Jesus honored such women highly in his ministry, as should we.

Second, secrets of the kingdom of God (4-10)

Large crowds were gathering to hear Jesus. How did Jesus view these crowds and his ministry to them? Jesus tells a parable to explain. Look at verses 5-8a. "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. 6Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. 7Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. 8Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and produced a crop, a hundred times more than was sown." In this parable, Jesus is the farmer sowing the seed of the word of God. He does so liberally, into all kinds of soil, who were the crowds of people. Although 3 out of 4 soils that received the seed did not bear fruit, Jesus still had great hope and saw a phenomenal harvest. Most farmers hope for yields of 7-10 times what was sown, but this seed yields 100 times as much!

How is such a harvest possible? It is possible through the power in the seed, the word of God. This power is unleashed in a heart that receives it. Jesus called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear (8)." Many did not respond, yet "His disciples asked him what this parable meant (9)." Jesus explains in verse 10. "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." The secrets of the kingdom of God are the gift of Jesus to his disciples. They will not be wasted on those who do not care to listen. Even today, some may say, "Ah, this parable? I've heard it before from better preachers." Some students are like this. They want an A in the class, to get a degree, but have no interest in the subject. A high school student may say to his math teacher, "Mr. Jeon, this is useless! I don't need Algebra to be a linebacker for the Bears!" This is discouraging to teachers, and for students this hinders their opportunity for life to the full. But Jesus was not discouraged. Jesus quoted Isaiah, full of hope as he saw his disciples eagerly anticipating the secrets he would disclose. Although they were full of weaknesses, doubts and fixed ideas, they were receptive to Jesus' message. Jesus saw the power of this message change the world through them.

Jesus sees each of us with the same hope: a phenomenal harvest in and through us. Like the disciples, we too have weaknesses, fears and fixed ideas. But that is why Jesus gave us this parable. Jesus wants to give us the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God, and let it explode out into a 100 times harvest in our lives. Let's have Jesus' hope for ourselves as we study this parable.

Third, seed of the kingdom of God (11-15)

Look at verse 11. "This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God." There is the power of life in the seed; God's word (Jn 5:24). This power of life in the word of God grows all by itself (Mk 4:27). Even if delivered poorly, this power is there. What is at issue is the condition of our heart soil. Jesus explains that at any time we may have one of four responses.

First, those along the path (12). Verse 12 reads, "Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved." The path of this world is wide and hard, beaten down and trodden on. Sometimes our hearts are like that. When our hearts are hard, we do not accept Jesus' word. Satan is there ready to snatch up the seed and destroy our way to salvation through it. Satan knows that if the word of God gets in, it will grow by itself. So he labors to explain it away through his lies: "God created man in his image? Nonsense! Evolution is truth!" In many ways the devil keeps people from believing and accepting one word of God.

Second, those on the rock (13). Verse 13 reads, "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 grows by itself. Knowing a truth from the Bible fills us with joy. But if we hold a rock in our heart and refuse to yield to the seed's growing, it cannot dig deep roots. This is a serious issue because the time of testing will come. Trials are necessary for our faith to grow deep and strong. Without growing a deep root sooner or later we fall away. In our post-modern age many have abandoned the idea of an absolute truth and instead think, "I have my own truth." While outwardly joyful due to living in a Christian community, inwardly they have no commitment to Jesus, and refuse to yield their own idea to the word of God and what it says. In effect, they have a rock in their heart that prevents the word from taking root. Eventually when trials come they fall away, or go church hopping. They cannot grow.

Third, the seed that fell among thorns (14). Look at verse 14. "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." Life's worries, riches and pleasures all compete for our time and attention. No matter what age we are, there are life worries. Even my son at age 4 has worries. When we are in college, we worry about our friendships: making them and maintaining them. We worry about our studies, our marriage. We worry about a career and a life. As we get older we worry about our children and their friendships, schooling, and marriage. We worry about mortgages, the soaring gas prices, and political turmoil in the nation. Even shepherds worry about their sheep, and this saps away from their spiritual life. Riches won't solve the problem, but only add to it. We also have life's pleasures, both good and bad. Video game systems are not targeted at kids any more, but guys in their 20's and 30's, and even 40's. Instead of struggling with God's word to know him and bear fruit, we play Lego Batman or the latest iteration of Madden Football. We don't need special soil for these thorns. But if they come in they naturally take over. If we allow them to grow rampant in our lives we never mature. The seed grows by itself, but if we do not provide room and nourishment, it is choked.

Jesus gave a principle to help us overcome life's worries, riches and pleasures. He said, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things shall be given to you as well (Mt 6:33)." This is a matter of trust. Do I trust that God's kingdom is best? If so, I must uproot the things that hinder the growth of his kingdom in my life. To give up something we love for God's kingdom is painful. But Jesus promises the fruit of the kingdom to us, and will not fail to reward us 100 times as much in this age, and in the age to come, eternal life (Mk 10:29). Decisions -- and you alone make them. If we want to mature in Christ, it is time to trust in God and allow his word to grow in us, exclusively.

Fourth, the seed on good soil (15). Look at verse 15. "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." Out of four, only this soil produces a crop. It is important to understand that good soil doesn't get that way by accident. Good soil must be cultivated. In my life I have had every one of these kinds of heart soil. Jesus' own disciples, like Peter and John, also had some issues with their heart soil while following Jesus. Jesus teaches us this parable so that we may have hope to be good soil and produce a crop in the end.

Jesus says this heart is noble and good. What we think about to a large degree determines the content of our heart. I used to listen to heavy metal music. The songs were always about death, war, violence and pain. Some music was specifically about Satan. You can imagine this doesn't make for good soil! Later I also was a slave to pornography. A very important step in cultivating our heart is to be transformed by renewing our mind. Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things." When we meditate on noble and good things, the other things are pushed out. Thank God that I was introduced to Godly music, like Keith Green. His music made me think about Jesus. Now I don't miss that old music at all. To be good heart soil, we can start by working on our thought world.

To counter the former soil types, Jesus teaches us that practice 3 actions. These cultivate our heart soil. Jesus says, "Hear the word." We receive the word through the Bible. If you are not reading the Bible, but expect a powerful spiritual and fruitful life, you are living in an alternate universe, not the world God created and the rest of us live in. On the flipside, if we listen to Oprah more than Jesus, we have a problem too. There must be a change in our attitude toward Jesus' word. The disciples were different from others because they believed Jesus' words were the words of eternal life. If you found path-life elements in your heart, don't be discouraged. God has already started on your soil. Now is the time to hear the word and heed the word for you personally.

Jesus says, "Retain it," meditating on it day and night. Holding on to the word of God is so important. Some of us may have found some rocky soil in our heart through Jesus' parable. For one reason or another we fear commitment to God and his plan, and don't want to let go of our own. Peter had the same problem when Jesus told him about the crucifixion. Peter didn't like it, and even rebuked Jesus. He was in danger of falling away, and even denied Jesus. But Jesus prayed for him to turn back, and he did. He gave up his plan and accepted Jesus' plan. If we yield to Jesus, as Peter did, we will grow and a harvest will come. In 1967, at the age of 17, Joni Eareckson Tada suffered a diving accident and became a quadriplegic. For 41 years she has been in a wheelchair, unable to move her arms or legs. Looking back, she saw this was God's plan for her, not a random act of a merciless god. At 17 she was a cultural Christian at best. Her plans were to get birth control pills so she could freely sleep with her boyfriend during college. But after the accident, in the hospital, she was bitter and alone, but God was there. Instead of holding on to her bitterness and broken dreams, she yielded to God's word, believing that God is good, all the time. God turned her attention to him and his plans for her. And they were wonderful plans. She has written books and encouraged countless thousands through her traveling and speaking ministry called Joni and Friends. If she had not yielded, imagine what a miserable life she would have lived. Let's come out of shallow religion, and let God's word dig deep into our personal lives, so we may trust him with everything.

Jesus says, "By persevering produce a crop." When we retain God's word in our hearts, it grows, and in its own time will produce a crop. In the meantime we persevere. This perseverance is in the hope of the crop. Putting other things aside, we devote ourselves to this goal. Through this year, I realized that to be fruitful requires perseverance in God's word, at the exclusion of other things. There have been so many thorns that needed to be plucked in my life. I had to overcome my worries about my family's survival. I had to overcome my video game playing and mature as a man. I did this by persevering in one direction: to serve Jesus. The seed grows by itself, but we either allow it or prevent it by what we persevere in. God will not be mocked. We will reap what we sow (Gal 6:7).

One practical way to sow for God's kingdom, cultivate our heart soil through these three practices is through personal testimony writing time. This is the time to hear and apply God's word personally. For more than five years, I wrote and shared my testimony every Friday. This wasn't easy to do week by week. One time I was sick and vomiting in the parking lot, and still shared. I never thought about not sharing, because I remember those times of struggling with God's word as the sweetest moments. It was great to practice self-denial, blocking out distractions, to focus on Jesus time; just him and me and his word. Back then I would sometimes handwrite 14 page testimonies, and shout into the microphone, I was full of spirit. I learned so much about Jesus, and so much about myself in the reflection of his word. If you want God's word to grow and bear fruit in your heart, I highly recommend personal testimony writing and sharing.

As sowers of God's word, we need to persevere for the harvest. One person really wanted to teach the Bible to a new student this fall. She went out fishing for many hours to invite students and joined outreach events. She met many people. Most didn't remain, but one student, on their second Bible study, said, "You are the answer to my prayers, and I'm so thankful you found me." "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up (Gal 6:9)."

In this passage Jesus saw the seed of the kingdom of God bearing a huge crop in the hearts of those who allow it to. We want to live a spiritually fruitful and a happy blessed life. So let's cultivate our heart soil so we may be good soil every time we hear God's word, retain it, and persevere to produce a great crop. Not just double our ministry, but become 100 times more fruitful.