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**When God Speaks**  
**Part 4 – Hearts Ready to Receive**  
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I myself felt like I crashed into this weekend with exhaustion. I work over at School of the Ozarks, and I don't understand the magic or what is taken out of all involved during that first week of school, but it is a monumental endeavor to get that whole school thing going back. I'm super thankful for the week. However, in preparation for school, I have two boys currently at SofO. Hudson is going into second grade and Boone is going into first grade.

A couple weeks ago before school, that ball started rolling and I just asked them, "Hey, Fellows, I'd love to hear what you're excited about this year. I'd love to hear what gets you up, about your excitement, about school starting up or maybe somethings that you are nervous about?" Now, we had these conversations totally separate of each other. Their answers were pretty much the exact same thing. And if you could guess the number one reason they are excited to go back to school as first and second grade full boys. Their number one answer was recess. Now that's a gut punch to me because I, as the assistant principal who directly oversees basically their day to day life, I'm thinking of all the children, my kids favorite thing is recess.

So, I'm going to give them a second chance, right? I'm going to give them a second opportunity to give me an answer like math or this great book that we're going to read. But no, the second answer was food. I'm like if you guys are not answering like boys... So, I even endeavored on a third opportunity to make me feel good about what we got going on at SofO and they said their friends. I gave them eyes like okay relationships are good. Love that about you. But something interesting actually came up that I had not yet heard from them when I asked them what they were nervous about.

When I asked them what they were nervous about, my oldest son who is very first born, wants to know everything that's going on, wants to have it all lined out very quickly, responded, "Well, I'm very nervous because in November, we're going to start writing in cursive and I'm worried I'm not going to be able to write cursive the right way." Wow. Didn't know cursive was that scary.

My second son gave a similar answer and similar direction that he was nervous about spelling tests. In first grade, they start in on that his sweet, gentle disposition was just nervous about spelling tests.

There are assessments in school. Many of you are thankful that you are out of school and there are no longer those types of assessments. But we know that there are many other assessments that are a part of our lives day to day even post education. Today, we'll be tackling the Parable of the Sower, found in Luke 8 in which Jesus, I believe, presents us with an opportunity or an assessment of some sorts.

You see, there are those whose job title is actually an assessor, correct? They are the ones that come and tell you the value of a home. To put it another way, they reveal to the homeowner what that house is currently worth on the market. There are medical assessments where we go into the doctor, and we have some ailment or something going on. We have an idea, but the master, the expert tells us what's really going on. They reveal to us what's going on in here.

A couple of weeks ago, in preparation for school, we decided that a personality assessment would be a good project for us, learning more about our colleagues and who they are and how they work. But all that personality assessment does is reveal to us maybe some things about who we are. What I think the best part about that is actually going to my teachers and saying, "Do you see this in my life?" "Is this a strength of mine?" "Is this a weakness of mine?" "How could I work on that?" They, in turn, are the eyes that I need in the revelation of maybe how I work, my personality. All assessments have a master or an expert that reveals something. Very much, that is the point of homework or test. The student comes and puts forth what he knows and the teacher grades in a response of saying I understand this, I'm the master of this and I'm revealing to you what you do or do not know."

For assessments, there are masters. These assessments can be super helpful, can't they? They can also be really hard to hear some of the news that comes from those that understand these assessments. But today, Jesus puts forth a parable in which we are to assess the state of our hearts. Not how well you write cursive or how valuable your things are or your medical situation or what kind of personality you have, but the nature and disposition of each of our hearts.

Jesus is chiefly concerned about our hearts. Scriptures is replete about the importance of the heart. Proverbs 4: 23 says, ***Above all else...*** Those are some pretty strong words. ***Above all else, guard your heart for everything you do flows from it.*** Jesus later talks about this concept of the heart and the importance and its role, but the good person, out of the good treasure of his heart produces good. The evil person, out of his evil treasure, produces evil. For out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks.

I've been toying with this idea of picking three or four books and having them be read every year at the same time for many years. I have not yet got there, but there is one book that I have committed to in that and that is a book entitled *Shepherding a Child's Heart*. It's by Paul David Tripp and it is two-fold for me in that yes I am a parent of three and I need reorientations often to the way in which I deal and discipline my own children. But even as my role at SofO as I work with children when sin pops up in their own mines.

An illustration that I think does a great job encapsulating both of these verses and truths is found in his book and that is "From the heart, behavior overflows." What we say and do is a direct correlation from our heart. To give you a really easy example about this, Paul David Tripp talks about this in that when Jenny hits Timmy on the playground, it's very easy for us as parents or even as teachers to go and assess why you hit that child. Just don't hit. Don't punch. I know you wanted the soccer ball. But rather, we should care far more about the frustration, the anger, the jealousy, the coveting that is happening here rather than how that transpired as an action. We deal with this and this will take care of itself, not the other way around.

Just easy thought here. What have we gained in disciplining a child if we just said don't hit. But the same instance occurs, and that child still walks away with anger, frustration, resentment, jealousy, coveting. Nothing has changed; just the behavior has been modified. And in regard to Shepherding a child's Heart, we go to the heart and deal with the heart first.

Now, every time I read that book I always kind of throw it down at some point and say, "You stop that." Because if you've read a parenting book, ultimately you go, "Hey listen, book, we're here to talk about the sin in my own child's life, not mine. Stop that." But inevitably, I'm changed. I'm reminded. I'm transformed by the reminder of the importance of the heart, not only of my child's but of my own heart.

Jesus is talking about the heart today. He consistently talks about it. Today, we are answering the question, as our title would communicate, hearts ready to receive. Maybe this is a question you've asked yourself or that you notice, but why is it that the same... just thinking educationally. A teacher gets up and gives the same explanation of a math concept and yet so many of the students take that in different ways. Some are confused. Some are not paying attention. Some want to know, but still don't understand. Some totally get it and are ready to move onto the next concept. A tricky question we can ask ourselves is why is it that some soil produces good fruit when other soil doesn't? This could be a simple AG101 question they attack. What does good soil look like and what does bad soil look like?

Jesus uses this idea of good and bad soil in regard to the nature and disposition of our hearts. In this parable, he uses God's Word to represent the seed. Our hearts are the soil. Why does transformation happen in some people's lives when hearing the truths of scripture and why does it do nothing other than in one ear and out the other for others. As we read this passage today, I ask that you begin to prepare your hearts for an assessment, a revelation of what is going on in the soil of your heart.

We're going to read the entire passage and then go through it a little bit by bit afterwards, but we're going to jump into Luke 8: 4-15. We're going to read all the way through. It's not a hard text. It's a simple text.

**Luke 8: 4-15** *4 And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, 5 "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. 6 And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. 7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. 8 And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold." As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

*9 And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, 10 he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.' 11 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 12 The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. 13 And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. 14 And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and*

***their fruit does not mature. 15 As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.***

One of the simplest principles to public speaking that you would find in any intro class would be the idea of knowing your audience. Good speakers have a grasp of who they are speaking to. Jesus does this perfectly. There are pictures and stories that simply highlight when these fails of public speakers who don't know who they are speaking to. One of my favorite happens to be from a story about an individual who was working for Coke. They sent him over to Saudi Arabia to put together a marketing campaign for a new kind of Coke beverage. Pretty simple idea. He had three pictures presented in this marketing campaign to sell this new type of Coke. The first picture and poster illustrated a man lying in a hot desert, exhausted in the sand. The second was then a picture of this individual drinking a nice, refreshing Coke. The third picture was this man being refreshed and replenished, feeling good. The individual did not know his audience for the product was not moving. It was asked why. He came to find out that he made a major mistake. For unlike we do in America, where we read a picture or text from left to right, those in Saudi Arabia read from the right to the left. So, to put it another way, what those in Saudi Arabia saw was a man totally being refreshed then drinking a Coke then lying in a desert exhausted. He did not know his audience.

Jesus, however, does. He presents the crowd with four soils that encompasses each and every individual's possibility of where their heart lies. Not only does he do that, but he also gives them a story in which they would very well understand, to a point. For those in Galilee at the time would have all been very familiar with farming, so the story is quite simple. A sower goes out with seed and throws it among many different soils. Some produce fruit and some don't. Not that crazy of a story. However, the one piece that would have piqued their interest would have been in the harvest and the ratio of the harvest. The passages said that it yielded a hundred-fold, far exceeding any return that they would ever see when they scattered their seed.

Now, very quickly after this, we see that the crowd is no longer a part of our story. But we see these individuals named the disciples, the followers of Jesus, and they come up and they say, "Jesus, we don't understand. How can this be? Explain this to us." They are curious and all but a subtle bit in a passage I think reveals quite a bit about what Jesus might say good soil is. Their curiosity has led them to dig deeper into what the passage of scripture means.

One of my favorite quotes regarding this idea or concept comes from Alistair Begg. *"We will never get to grips with a message of Christianity from the safe distance of a detached curiosity."*

The disciples were curious. The very people walking with Jesus were the very people to come up after he gives this parable and say, "Jesus, we don't understand. Tell me more. Explain what you mean by this Parable of the Sower. What do you mean by these four soils?"

We will take the rest of our time here to go through each of those soils and see how Jesus explains it. This assessment of each of our hearts I hope is beneficial for us. So, we turn to Verse 12 in which Jesus explains the first soil. ***The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.***

These individuals' hearts are careless with God's word. They care not for Jesus, they care not for him on the cross, but come for various reasons. Whether just to be entertained, to hear why everybody is coming from city to city, about who Jesus is and this message he has. They stand in the crowd. The devil comes and takes this good word away from their hearts as he whispers lies. The lies maybe look like things that have been said. "You don't have to listen or accept this." "You don't need saving." "This is not true." "This message that Jesus is giving, you don't need it." "I'm here for the entertainment." "I'm just here to see what Jesus is saying." "Everybody is talking about it. people are coming from far and wide." And finally, "I'm not in need of a savior." The lies of the evil one speaking to the hearts of those in this soil believe they need no savior. They are not saved. They've not accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior and they move on.

The next soil that Jesus describes and explains are those that fall on a rock. **13 And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.** They may once say "Jesus, you are Lord," but at the first sign of any pushback, any testing, any trials, they revert back to their old ways, not living in a life transformed by Christ on the cross.

I've always loved Ted's illustration that he given in which he talks about the US Bus. All of these things make up me – scripture, truth, tradition, experience, reason, and emotion. And every time I think about this passage, I always think that Jesus is talking about somebody whose emotion is driving the bus. They say the words, they've accepted Christ, they experience this conversion, their emotions are living on a high, they love that feeling. Yet when they get back into life and things aren't going the right way and all their problems are not fixed, they are back down in the valley, struggling.

I saw my first car wreck about a month ago. A man was on his cell phone. I saw him from here to the back of the auditorium. I was driving. He swerved three or four times. His end was flipping over into the ditch upside down. I pulled off, grabbed my phone and called 911. I ran over and thankfully there were four individuals already on top of it. The driver was out of his car, stunned and shocked at what had just transpired. A mother was ripping out the passenger door of the back seats, and two men were on the back, kicking out the back window, busting it out, ripping everything out. I didn't know what we were going to uncover. The mother ripped open the door and we found two boys strapped in their car seats, hanging upside down. They came out and were in shock.

Every time I think about my emotions driving a bus, I think about that car wreck. I know even my emotions are just so finicky. They are all over the place. And when my emotions drive the bus, there can be a lot of damage. Emotions can get me in damage when I am led by those. When was speaking with my friend about this passage, he had something that I thought was very good. He said, "As Christians, we start with what we know, not how we feel." That's why memorizing God's Word is so important. That is why memorizing and reciting things like the Apostle's Creed or the Nicene Creed or worshipping together... We start with a proclamation that "Lord, you are King." And then we come in humility with our hearts, "Lord, here I am." We start with what we know.

The third soil is in verse **14 And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not**

**mature.** One of the best things that I have read or an idea that has really helped me in my own life comes from St. Augustine. In this, he talks about this idea of Ordo Amoris. Ordo Amoris loosely translates to *rightly ordered affections*. This idea of rightly ordered affections means that the right things in the right way would be ordered in my life. When I think about this passage or this soil, it is that the cares of my life would take president over Christ. Paul David Trip talks about this idea of their being a throne in our hearts and we must decide who will sit on that throne. Is it riches? Pursing all things, all items, hoping they would bring joy, peace, the pleasures of life that God has given us? You see, God has given us all of those things, but unfortunately, sometimes they can be way out of whack in our life. Are these things rightly ordered in our lives. And when they are not, they choke out the gospel. These weeds can rightly keep us from hearing God's word. Rightly keep our hearts from receiving when God speaks.

I happen to work on the second floor of the Youngman Ag department at College of the Ozark which means I had the opportunity to sit down with one of the professors/instructors down there and say, "Teach me about good soil. Teach me the difference between good soil and bad soil." I'm thankful he said I got halfway through Soils 1, so I added that to my resume. But he talked about this concept of a weed seed bank. The idea that in a garden there is a weed seed bank. This idea that when weeds come up and we pull them, I'd like, in my naive mind, to think that the weed is gone, but that's not true. There are seeds that fall and others that are spread to other weeds that keep coming from those weeds that I pulled. Over time, as we continue to pull these things, just like in our hearts... There are a lot of things that I love that can very easily find their way to sitting on the throne of my heart. There are many things that, in a heart check, I go "Wow, this thing is way out of order in my life." And I must be continually thinking about the weed seed bank and pulling those things out. "Lord, you're on the throne." I'm pulling these weeds that can be things that I often struggle with putting on the throne of my heart. An easy way to think about it is what do I care about? What do I think about? What do I love? That is a great way to reveal what that might be for you.

I finish this morning with the good seed. ***15 As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.*** Often times, when I want to do something, I just ask, "Give me the picture of where to go." I think we all understand that sometimes giving a picture of what not to do can be just as helpful. When I think in terms of good soil, I revert to the other soils, the other dispositions of the heart. What is it that kept them from producing a good fruit? The birds that come steal the seed. The seed that sprouted quickly but had no depth to it as it was pulled with the wind and the rain. And the other seed that is not provided the right space for the seed to grow and germinate.

I want to make this point really quickly. All seed... my friend in the AG Department said this. All seed needs to be maneuvered to receive good seed. And it would be very easy to believe that it is upon us doing the work to see fruit. It would be easy to believe that we're the farmers, tilling and doing all these things in order that something would be producing fruit. Very simply put, good soil does nothing on its own. The soil will not produce any fruit no matter how good it is. It is only by the power of the seed that fruit and transformation happens. Jesus preaches this parable to a crowd in which he knows all four soils are present. Those that do not know him, those that have not accepted his message... I believe for those that don't now Jesus, if you are assessing your heart and you've not placed faith in

Christ and in Christ alone, I do not want you to get confused that there is work for you to do. The only thing is that you come before the Lord with a humble heart. "Lord, I recognize my soil is not good. I recognize I am a sinner in need of a savior. I place my faith in you, Lord." I know those individuals are in here today. And if you feel a heart tug, please know that is the Holy Spirit speaking to you about your heart soil. If you want to know more about that or want to speak more about that, after we conclude, the prayer team will be up front, and they would love to walk you through what salvation and placing faith in Christ alone looks like.

For those that have accepted Jesus, I think this parable provides us things which we may need to be aware of. Things that we, as the gardeners of the soil, know Jesus is the one that tills the soil. His grace comes and turns us over that life maybe had. If you have placed faith in Christ, may these be a warning to you about the fruit that sprouts from your soil. That you would not be careless with the Lords Word. That you would water it, you would hold it fast, you would value it, you would meditate on it day and night. It is not the soil where the power is at; it's the seed. Jesus clearly states that over and over again. It's in the power of the seed.

I desire to finish our time together with a passage found in Psalm 139. As you have rightly or hopefully assessed your own heart and ask, what soil do you find yourselves in? I want to come back to something mentioned in the beginning in regards to having a heart ready to receive. For all assessments have a master that comes and reviews. Jesus is the master. Jesus is the expert. He desires deeply for your heart to be transformed.

**Psalm 139 - 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! 24 And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting!**

When God speaks, may our hearts be ready to receive. For those who don't know Christ, come with humility, asking for the gospel of Jesus to till your heart that it may receive the seed of God's Word.

Father, Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting! Amen.