

# The Receptive Heart

Four Soils - Pastor Jonathan Minter - November 30, 2025 - Luke 8:4-15

**INTRO:** Good morning church!

**Need:** So how are you and God?...

When's the last time you asked that question? We can get on autopilot in life, can't we? But sometimes life will crash into you and cause you to think about such things. The death of a loved one. A major health diagnosis. Having kids. Losing a job. Losing a marriage.

And then how do you even answer that question? If you are here this morning, then chances are you have some sort of thermometer in your mind that you are maybe using right now to answer that in your own head. Maybe it is something like:

- How often you have been at church, read your Bible, the last time you prayed
- Some morality measure like the last time you drank too much, your internet search history, or something like that
- Or how you are relating to other people - like are your relationships currently in a state of peace and harmony vs being in conflict with others

If we're honest with ourselves, sometimes we are all over the place, aren't we? Sometimes we feel like we're doing great, then other times we're just blowing it spiritually. Sometimes we have what feels like supernatural motivation to do the things we really want to do and not do the things we don't want to do. And other times, we just feel apathetic, like we just actually don't really care. If we're honest, we're just bored.

Why is there such a variation in how we ourselves feel about our spiritual health from one day to the next? Why is there such a variation in different people and how they seem to be doing spiritually?

**Trans:** Jesus has an explanation for this. As the one who created us, he knows the human condition. He sees through all the external facades and activities and things we do to keep ourselves looking busy and productive. Jesus knows that the key to our spiritual health is our **heart**. That place deep inside of us that reveals what we really want in life - or our will. He wants to help us diagnose how we are really doing spiritually.

**BODY:** In the parable of the sower, Jesus taught that the key to bearing the fruit of the Kingdom of God is a heart that is receptive to the word of God. We can cultivate a receptive heart and bear the fruit of the Kingdom of God. What does it look like to have a heart that is receptive to the Word of God? Jesus gives us 4 heart conditions that illustrate different degrees of receptivity to the Word of God.

**Read text:** Luke 8:4-15 (ESV) 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.

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## FOUR HEART CONDITIONS THAT ILLUSTRATE RECEPTIVITY TO THE WORD OF GOD:

### 1. An open heart.

**EXP:** (4-5; 10-12) Jesus teaches another famous parable to the great crowds in Luke 8, but this one is uniquely significant as Jesus says in Mark 4:13, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?" There is something significant about the four soils parable that we must investigate together.

He quotes from Isaiah: "seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand." Jesus is revealing what

Understanding it begins with the path:

**"Great crowd"** (4) (ὄχλου πολλοῦ, *ochlou polou*) - many, much, large; a crowd, multitude

**"Parable"** (4) (παράβολή, *parabolē*) - literally to throw ahead or cast before. A placing of one thing by the side of another, juxtaposition; a comparing, comparison of one thing with another, likeness, similitude.

**"Sower"** (5) (σπείρω, *speirō*) - to sow, scatter, seed

**"The path"** (5) (ὁδός, *hodos*) - a way; a travelled way, road; a travellers way, journey, travelling. In first-century fields, paths were created by constant foot traffic. Over time, the soil became hard, packed, and impenetrable. Seed couldn't sink in, it just lay exposed on the surface, easy for birds to snatch. Some reasons why a person might be the path:



1. They've become unreceptive to God's word—either through pride, cynicism, hurt, or familiarity. Saying things like, "I already know this." "This doesn't apply to me." "I don't need God."
2. Just as a path is hardened by traffic, some people are hardened by: repeated disappointments, wounds that make trust difficult, habitual sin that numbs the conscience, cycles of unbelief. The heart becomes packed down, not from one moment but from many passings over.
3. Because the seed doesn't sink in, Jesus says the devil snatches it (8:12). The path person is vulnerable: no spiritual protection, no roots, no inner response, and the truth is quickly replaced by lies
4. Familiar but unmoved. The path would be walked on all the time—**common ground**.

**"Trampled underfoot"** (5) (καταπατέω, *katapateō*) - to tread down, trample under foot, to trample on; metaphor for to treat with rudeness and insult

**"Birds of the air"** (5) (πετεινόν, *peteinon*) - flying or winged animals, birds; the birds of the heaven. Jesus defines this in verse 12 as being Satan and the evil powers of this world.

**"Devoured it"** (5) (κατεσθίω, *katesthiō*) - to consume by eating, to eat up, devour.

**"Disciples asked him ... what this meant"** (9) - "Hey Jesus, this is confusing, what do you mean by these soils?" Aren't we so thankful for the disciples here because now we get the explanation.

**"To you it has been given"** (10) (δίδωμι, *didōmi*) - to grant, give to one asking, let have; to supply, furnish, necessary things

**"To know the secrets"** (10) (μυστήριον, *mustērion*) - where we get the word "mystery." hidden thing, secret, mystery; generally mysteries, religious secrets.

**"The kingdom of God"** (10) (βασιλεία, *basileia*) - a kingdom, the territory subject to the rule of a king; used in the N.T. to refer to the reign of the Messiah.

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**"The seed is the word of God" (11)** (λόγος, *logos*) - Thank you for this clear distinction Jesus! He tells us plainly that this "seed" is in fact the Word of God, so what does He mean by Word of God? The word of God is shorthand for the gospel message. God's saving announcement that His kingdom has arrived in Jesus. This is teaching about God, a call to repentance, promises of salvation, and revelation of Jesus as the King.

**"The path are those who have heard" (12)** (ἀκούω, *akouō*) - simply to hear. Apparently it went in their ears but went no farther. Their well-trodden heart has no opening for the Word.

**"The devil comes and takes away" (12)** (διάβολος, *diabolos*) - Satan; false accuser, devil, slanderer. When the Word of God only ever goes in the ears but not beyond it is easy to snatch. The 18 inch journey from the brain to the heart is the most important distance in this life.

**"The word from their hearts" (12)** (καρδιά, *kardia*) - Denotes the centre of all physical and spiritual life.

**"So that they may not believe" (12)** (πιστεύω, *pisteuō*) - to think to be true, to be persuaded of, to credit, place confidence in; of the thing believed, to credit, have confidence.

**"Be saved" (12)** (σώζω, *sōzō*) - to save, keep safe and sound, to rescue from danger or destruction

**ARG: Have an open heart which is ready to receive the truth with meekness:**

Hosea 10:12 (ESV) 12 ...break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.

James 1:21 (ESV) ... receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

**When you hear the voice of God today, do not harden your heart:**

Hebrews 3:7-8 (ESV) <sup>7</sup> Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, <sup>8</sup> do not harden your hearts ..."

**Don't assume you can wait, seek the Lord now:**

Isaiah 55:6-7 (ESV) "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; <sup>7</sup> let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

**ILL:** Have you ever looked into the eyes of your child when you are giving them instruction and you can tell nobody is home. Sure, they are standing there quietly "listening" but the power is off upstairs. Then you ask, "What did I just say" and you get crickets. Some of you are hearing the word, but you need the power turned on. Hear the voice of the Lord today and do not harden your hearts.

**APP:** Maybe someone here is that hard path this morning. You've heard the message of the good news of Jesus Christ. But you have hardened your heart to him and not allowed the word to penetrate your heart. I can only repeat: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart." "Seek the Lord while he may be found."

He is here speaking to you today. He can still be found. *Share the gospel.*

Maybe you are here this morning and you've been sowing the seed of the word of God with someone in your life, but it has fallen on a hard path. They have not received it. What is our responsibility in that case? Continuing sowing. Be sure the seed you are sowing is the pure Word of God - the gospel of Jesus, not the gospel of church, of "all your problems will be solved," of "Jesus will give you health, wealth and prosperity." But don't lose heart. Continue spreading the seed.

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## 2. A dependent heart.

6 And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture.

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.

EXP: (6; 13)

We have four parts going on in verse 6 so let's start with that...

"some (seed) fell on **The rock**" (6) (πέτρα, *petra*) - a projecting rock, crag, rocky ground



- Rocky ground isn't where plants grow into healthy and fruitful plants. The Gospel of Mark says that it did not have much soil on this rocky ground. Some soil may be seen up top but underneath are rocks.

"**Grew up**" (6) (φύω, *phuō*) - to grow, to shoot forth, spring up. KJV says, "as soon as it was sprung up."

- It looks good for a moment but look what happens to it...

"**Withered away**" (6) (ξηραίνω, *xērainō*) - to become dry, to be dry, be withered; to waste away, pine away.

- It withers to lifelessness, and why?

"**No moisture**" (6) (ἰκμάς, *ikmas*) - dampness, moisture. Seeds need to be watered!

- It wasn't rooted enough to have moisture. This kind of soil, this kind of ground, this heart couldn't survive long like this.

Let's see how Jesus explains the parable to his followers...

"**The rock are those who ... receive it with joy**" (13) (χαρά, *chara*) - joy, gladness.

- This is the human heart being described here. Jesus even acknowledges that it was receptive at first! Receiving the word with joy. But what was missing?

"**Have no root**" (13) (ρίζα, *rhiza*) - a root; that which like a root springs from a root, a sprout, shoot.

- Here is the primary issue of the rock, not that the trials will come because they come to all, but rather that there were no roots. The Word sounded good and immediately impacted you, but you went no further. The belief was temporary...

"**They believe for a while**" (13) (καιρός, *kairos*) - due measure; a measure of time, a larger or smaller portion of time

- What?! Believe for a while? We see many people follow Jesus for a time, but something happens to them. A teaching they cannot accept, a promise they don't cling to, and dependence on the literal manifested word of God, Jesus is not present. For a while, it seemed good, but then...

"**In time of testing fall away**" (13) (πειρασμός, *peirasmos*) - trial, proving; a putting to proof, temptation.

- Their belief was surface level... A time came where they seemed to thrive, but their heart could only allow growth to go so far. They fall away.

When we see people respond well to the word of God we can tend to lower our guard. They seem joyful, glad, and growing. However, the tests come, in Matthew and Mark it describes trials and tribulations, and they wither away. A strong receptivity to the word at first is proven to reject the word when they need it the most. When tests come are you dependent on the word of God or have you withered away?

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You may have heard some say things like this:

- “This isn’t what I signed up for. I may have joined this church, but I didn’t sign up for this!”
  - In Matthew’s telling of the parable it says the sun scorched what had grown. Trials, and tribulations will come to all who have heard the word of God. The difference is if the word has taken root or not.
  - The enemy didn’t have to take it away. The heat just had to get turned up...
- “Jesus can’t ask *that* of me.”
  - Jesus said, “Follow me.” and crowds followed! But why did they follow?
    - I am reminded of those who followed Jesus for blessings in John 6, but failed to follow Jesus for who he was. The multitudes were feed miraculously by Jesus and then they came again. This ends with many disciples leaving Jesus because they couldn’t believe that Jesus would say that he was the bread of life come down from heaven that they must consume to live. They were all in for the blessings of perishable food, but not for the imperishable food, that is, Jesus himself.
  - Is your heart receptive to his word? Do you love the word of God? Or can it be that we take the blessings and turn our backs on the blesser when things get uncomfortably difficult.

What is the cure to rocky soil?

**ARG:** Argue for dependence on Christ and others (those Christ has given us for building up)

First, it’s accepting the word of God as just that... God’s word!

1 Thessalonians 2:13 (ESV) And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of me but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

If this is merely man’s words on paper or a self-help, easy, feel good, message then when trials come we will flee. But if this is God’s word then it is trustworthy, profitable for teaching us, and sufficient for us in days of trouble.

And it will reveal what our true heart looks like - if we will let it.

Hebrews 4:12 (ESV) For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

As we come to Jesus, he will reveal to us where our heart and his heart don’t line up. He does it slowly, with grace, with gentleness. But always with honesty - we will have a choice to make when that decision point comes. And it might be painful. It might feel like heat. But if we can endure that and align our hearts with his heart, he will carry us through.

Second, we can recognize one of the reasons tests, trials, and tribulations come.

1 Peter 1:6-7 (ESV) 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

It is a merciful thing that God allows our faith to be tested. This provides assurance for the one who endures, and reveals the need for the Gospel to the one who falls. Jesus is greater than a surface level belief that withers in trial, instead we can have belief that rejoices in trials knowing that it brings us into closer conformity with Christ!

Third, become dependent on the gracious blessings Christ has given to us who believe.

Jesus Christ Himself,

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The Church,

Galatians 6:2 (ESV) Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:24-26 (ESV) But God has so composed the body...if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

This strikes right at the heart of something we are all conditioned to as we grow up - be independent, find your own way, be self-sufficient. Learning to rely on others until you have roots of your own is key to spiritual growth.

John 15:5... 2 Cor "sufficient grace"... Psalm 23

ILL:

APP: Truly dependent or barely at all? What can you do?

- Frequent watering (preaching, reading, praying, connected to the body, mutual encouragement, dependence on Christ and his people.

## 3. A focused heart.

EXP: v7: "And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it."

v14: "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."

Jesus moves to the 3rd soil - the 3rd heart condition - the soil where the seed of the Word of God fell and was received, but along with that, there were other things growing too. And the other things growing in that soil robbed the nutrients from the word of the Kingdom of God. So while they were both growing, the fruit that God was looking for never matured.



I think here of our tomato plants - if the plants aren't getting the nutrients they need, you will start seeing those small, green tomatoes, but they just never quite turn into those juicy, beefy tomatoes you are looking for. They stay small, they rot before they ripen. Something is competing for the nutrients they need.

What, might you ask, are the sorts of things that compete with the Kingdom of God? Jesus gives us 3 things in this life that can distract us and cause us to lose focus:

1. "The thorns ... choked by the cares" (14) (μέριμνα, *merimna*) - care, even anxiety
2. "Riches" (14) (πλοῦτος, *ploutos*) - riches, wealth; abundance of external possessions
3. "Pleasures" (14) (ἡδονῶν, *hēdonē*) - sensual delight; by implication, desire, lust, pleasure.

"Their fruit does not mature" (14) (τελεσφορέω, *telesphoreō*) - to not bring to (perfection) maturity; of fruits

These things are not all bad.

1. It is good to care about the people in your life, your dominion, your area of influence.
2. God gives wealth and possessions to us to use for his Kingdom.
3. God made us as creatures with the ability to enjoy the pleasures of life.

It is when these things usurp the place of importance that should only be occupied by King Jesus that they become problems. When they become our aim, we will miss the mark. When we receive them as gifts from



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our Creator, designed by him to be enjoyed within the limits that he has provided, we can truly enjoy them and not allow them to entangle our heart.

Jesus wants us to have a focused heart - focused on what? Focused on producing fruit for the Kingdom of God. Being willing to do whatever it takes to bear the fruit of the Kingdom of God.

Maybe that's you today - the Holy Spirit is pricking your heart right now and helping you see that you have grown distracted by the things of this world. Your life might be bearing fruit, but it looks like the fruit of the world and not the fruit of the Kingdom of God.

His call to you today - get focused.

**ARG:** The riches of the Kingdom of God are worth it.

Matthew 13:44-46 (ESV) "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

There is a spiritual reality that is just as real as the physical reality we can see and touch and feel. The earth and everything in it is good, it was made by a good God and he gave it to us as his image-bearers. But when we forget that there is a God who necessarily stands outside of his creation, and only focus on the created order, we miss reality.

Colossians 3:1-2 (ESV) If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Matthew 6:31-33 (NLT) "So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' 32 These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. 33 Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need."

**ILL:** Modern life

**APP:** What is choking out the word in your life? Do you have any space in your life that you have carved out to "set your mind on the things that are above?"

The author John Eldredge talks about creating a sacred space in your life daily. What would it look like to sit for 5 minutes - no phone, no music, no reading, no task list - just sitting quietly and asking God to be with you, telling God you want to be with him. Go outside early in the morning. Sit in a quiet room.

Here's what we know will happen in those 5 minutes. Your brain is going to dart around and think about 37 other things than God. If you are like me, you'll reflexively reach for your phone, even if it's on airplane mode.

All those things that will interrupt those 5 minutes are *thorns*. They are choking out the nutrients your soul needs to draw life from the presence of God in your life.

## 4. A fruitful heart.

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**EXP:** (8;15)

**“Good soil” (8)** (ἀγαθός, *agathos*) - of good constitution or nature, useful, salutary, good, pleasant, agreeable, joyful, happy.



**“Yielded a hundredfold” (8)** (ποιέω, *poieō*) - to make ready, to prepare; to produce, bear, shoot forth

**“He who has ears” (8)** - Of course we have physical ears, but are we open? Are we listening spiritually?

**“Good soil ... hold it fast” (15)** (κατέχω, *katechō*) - to hold fast, keep secure, keep firm possession of; take

**“An honest and good heart” (15)** (καλός, *kalos*) - praiseworthy, noble; beautiful by reason of purity of heart and life

**“Bear fruit with patience” (15)** (ὑπομονή, *hupomonē*) - steadfastness, constancy, endurance; remain under.

**ARG:** Make no mistake - Jesus expects us to bear fruit. And he tells us what that fruit is. It is not a mystery.

John 15:8,12 (ESV) By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples... This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

The fruit Jesus is looking for is **love**. And Paul further explains that love the container of all the fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV) <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control.

Colossians 1:10 (ESV) Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

The “knowledge of God” is not just knowing facts about God - it is knowing God - interactive relationship with God. Interactive relationship with Love will lead to us bearing the fruit of that relationship and loving others through good works.

**ILL:**

**APP:** Jesus actually tells us what we must do if we want to bear fruit.

Hold on to Jesus and your brothers and sisters, allow your roots to grow. Then get the rocks and thorns out. In ever increasing measure, remove anything that will compete with the nutrients that your heart needs to focus on God and his kingdom.

Then: “hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.”

- Have an honest and good heart
  - Get honest with yourself about the condition of your heart, allow God to show you where your heart doesn’t line up, where your internal motivations don’t line up with what you say you most desire. Learn to get honest with God so you can become honest with yourself.
  - Once you have a better picture of what your heart is like, align it with God, align it to the goodness of the Kingdom of God
- Bear fruit with patience
  - Be patient, offer yourself to God, allow him to do the work that only he can do, in his timing

Be patient with yourself. Be patient with those around you. Rest.

Right after



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### **CONCLUSION:**

Connection to Advent - "let every heart prepare him room"