



GROWTH GROUP

Jesus' Parable of Listening to God's Word

Week of 7/26/2020

How do you get people to join your church? There are lots of suggestions. Most people suggest something special for every age group. It seems that you need to provide people with all kinds of programs. You also need to tell people what they want to hear. You may get people to join your church that way, but chances are they won't ever become a part of the holy Christian church. You only become a member of God's kingdom one way: through the preaching of the gospel. But even the success of our gospel preaching doesn't depend on us. Instead, it depends entirely upon God's power and blessing.

Getting Started

How much of a gardener are you? Do you have a green thumb? Get this party started. It's a great time to talk about the success you've had gardening (or lack thereof), and a lot of people have taken up gardening this year.

Into the Word

Read **Isaiah 55:10-13**.

True or false: Whenever we proclaim God's Word, we can be certain that our listeners will be brought to faith. **False.** The gospel does not automatically produce faith. When we use the gospel, we hope and pray that this will be the outcome, but sadly there are many who reject the forgiveness that God offers in his Word and harden their hearts to its truths.

What does God mean that his Word never returns to him empty but accomplishes what he desires? He means that there is never a "neutral" hearing of his Word. God's Word either produces and strengthens faith in the hearts of his hearers, or it serves to harden those hearts. Even Jesus' disciples—although still believers—were sometimes hardened to the truth of God's Word when they refused to believe certain things.

Read **Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23**.

What is Jesus' point in this parable? A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Jesus told many simple parables to the people of his day, using everyday events to help people understand the kingdom of God. The sower in this parable scatters the seed of the gospel to all with no regard for where it might land. Yet most of his seed bears no fruit. Jesus warns us that the seed of the Word faces great opposition from sin, Satan, and the world. Newborn faith can be choked or scorched. The gospel promise can be snatched from apathetic or misunderstanding soil. Though we sow the seed faithfully and generously, Jesus warns us that most of it will never bear fruit that lasts. Yet, Christ comforts us by showing that our job is to sow the seed and leave the growing up to God. He comforts us by pointing to what his Word does in the good soil: it plants great faith that does great things. The different soils represent different listening or ways we pay attention to God's Word.

What is the gospel good news in this parable? You have God's Word planted in you, because he sought out to spread his Word to you!

Apply

At different times of your life (probably even different times of your day for that matter), you have been each of the soils Jesus refers to in this parable because of the ways you listen, receive, and pay attention to God's Word. When have you found yourself to be receptive soil? When have you found yourself to be other kinds of soil? What kinds of things happen in your life to help make you good soil and what kinds of things can happen in your life that make you bad soil? **Answers will vary and I apologize for the annoying long questions. The point of this question is to get us to recognize what things in our lives often distract us and to recognize that we often pay attention to God's Word best when things are not going well in our lives.**

Sometimes the distractions (weeds) in our lives need to be removed altogether (turn off). Sometimes the things we let distract us from God's Word are things that are good to give our attention to, but then we need to be able to move on and give our attention to more important things (turn up). For each of the following lists, choose one thing that you think might be helpful to turn off and one to turn up to mitigate distraction.

<u>At Home</u>	<u>In Society</u>	<u>At Church</u>
Watching TV/Movies	Politics	Procedural Matters
Pursuing a Hobby	Current Events	Debates over Style
Social Engagements	Social Media	Building Projects
Playing Video Games	Work/Career	Finance Management
Gardening/Yard Manicuring	Retirement Plan/Management	Charisma
Decorating/Redecorating	Charitable Causes	Programs & Activities
Cooking/Eating	Continued Education	Fellowship Opportunities

Answers will vary. Keep in mind that most things are fine in moderation, so this isn't an attempt to condemn items on these lists. Just a way to control their power over you. Adding other things to the lists is fine.

Around the Room

Share your highs and lows for the week as well as your prayer requests for the group.