



A. Converts and Disciples

*“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized, and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And **they continued steadfastly** in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:41-42)*

They continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers.

1. The mission of the local church is not just soul-winning, but making disciples, maturing saints. (Ephesians 4:12).
2. The first thing mentioned about the local church was faithfulness to attend and receive the teaching.
3. Faithful attendance is linked with growth in the Word of God.
 - a. You cannot stay at home and fully mature.
 - b. Apostle’s doctrine means you had to be where the apostles were to receive the Word.
4. Attention - listening to the teaching is implied.
5. You can’t live on streaming video at home.

B. The Gospel and the Word

“As He spoke these words, many believed in Him.

31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, *“If you abide (continue) in My word, you are My disciples indeed. **32** And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”*

33 They answered Him, *“We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will be made free?’”* John 8:30-32

If you continue in my word - then you are, disciples.

C. Defining A Disciple

1. A disciple is one who *continues* in the word.
2. Discipleship is not just a spiritual buddy or mentor.
3. The main place for discipleship is the local church.

4. The main means of discipleship is teaching of the word.
5. If the word makes disciples, more word produces more disciples and more stable disciples (Acts 6:1-7).
6. Two parts to the great commission:
 - a. Soulwinning (streets).
 - b. Disciples (church).
 1. We are to establish people in church and can make people converts too.
 2. We need to encourage people to go to church.
 - a. Acts 3:8 - "he (the healed lame man) followed them."
 - b. Hebrews 10:25 - "not forsaking... but exhorting."
7. Discipleship is almost impossible without faithful church attendance and attention to the word.

D. A Key Parable

The Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:13-25).

1. This parable is a key to the whole of the Word.

"He said to them, do you not understand this parable? How then will you know all parables?" (vs. 13)

This parable is a large overview of the plan of God of how to make disciples out of converts.

2. Most Bible doctrines can be taught from this parable:
 1. Grace.
 2. Faith.
 3. Healing.
 4. Finances.
 5. Maturity.
 6. Believer's death and resurrection.

This Parable Teaches Five Truths:

1. The Character of God - *God is a giver*. It is His nature to give and not to steal (James 1:17).
2. The Character of Satan - *Satan is a thief* (John 10:10).

Satan has never created anything and cannot. He can only attempt to steal what God has made and given. He uses demons, circumstances, and people. They are the birds that come to steal the seed.

3. The Sower is the Pastor - The sower, in this parable, is not Jesus.

Jesus mentioned Himself as a sower, but this was in the parable of the wheat and tares (Matthew 13:36, 37). The pastor's main responsibility is to "feed the church of God" (Acts 20:28). He covers the ground equally and without partiality.

4. The Seed is God's Word - *The sower sows **the word**.*

Please note - This seed is not the gospel.

5. The Ground is the Heart of the Believer - *All four types of ground are the hearts of believers.*

- a. All four types of ground come to church.

- b. The heart of the believer is the only variable in this parable. You can work on and change your heart.

1. **God** never changes.
2. **Satan** never changes.
3. **The seed** (word) never changes.
4. **The minister** does not change.

- c. The **ground** is the key to the parable. Bad ground can become good ground and good ground can become better.

E. The Royal House of God

*"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. **21** Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. **22** Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." 2 Timothy 2: 20-22*

This Key Parable Has a Key Verse for Each Hearer.

"If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mark 7:16). Let him keep on hearing - present linear action).

*"... They **continued** steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine" (Acts 2:42).*

“If you abide (continue) in My word, you are My disciples indeed” (John 8:31).

Each type of ground heard longer than the previous before giving up. Despite deceitfulness of riches, good times, and bad, some kept on hearing and went on to be good ground.

Your Heart is the Key.

You are the one responsible to make or break the maturity barrier.

*“He said to them, “Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear (keep on hearing), **more** will be given. **25** For whoever **has**, to him more will be given; but whoever **does not have**, even what he **has** will be taken away from him.” Mark 4:24, 25)*

When you have hearing ears you give God authority to give more, and you give Satan authority to steal what God has given. The issue is not God Who gives. Neither is it Satan who steals. The issue is the attitude of your heart.

The Local Church

1. The way Satan keeps you from the word is the way he keeps you from the place that teaches the word - the local church.
2. These are four types of ground (hearts). All four are believers. They all come to church.
 - a. Hard ground (non-hearing). Satan comes **immediately** and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.
 - b. Stones (no root). **Immediately** receives the word but only endure for a time. Then they **immediately** are offended.
 - c. Thorns (caught up in the cares of this world). They hear the word, *but* the word is choked by cares of life, riches, and the lust of other things which takes away the ability for the word to produce.
 - d. Good ground (increases 30, 60, 100 fold).
3. *“...bear fruit” (vs. 20).*
 - a. Bearing fruit is evidence of a disciple (John 15:8).
 - b. About 1/4 of your people will become disciples.

The Parable (Mark 4:14-25)

Hard Ground (vs. 14-15)

*“The sower sows the word. 15. And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes **immediately** and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.”*

Stony Ground (vs. 16-17)

*“These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; 17. And they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word’s sake, **immediately** they stumble (are offended).”*

Four Points Defining an Offense

1. An offense is a molehill that becomes magnified into a mountain.
 - a. Not usually over someone committing adultery or stealing money from the church
 - b. But over carpet or wall colors and pews instead of chairs.
 - c. The sound system is too loud or not loud enough.
 - d. The auditorium is too cold or too hot.
 - e. Too many or not enough hymns are sung. Too many new songs.
 - f. Stand too long and the service should end sooner.
 - g. People become offended at me personally: clothes I wear, the car I drive, the decisions made over the future of the church.
2. The pastor’s wife does not sing, play an instrument, or teach.
3. An offense did not happen to everyone, only you.
 - a. Pastor did not say “hi” to you in the hallway.
 - b. The youth director has something against your teenager.
 - c. The praise leader did not like your voice and now ignores you.
 - d. Your class had a party, and you didn’t get invited.
4. Offense is a side issue which consumes your attention.
 - a. It is a tool of Satan which takes your attention away from the real issues – the word.
 - b. You are now preoccupied with what others may or may not think of you.
 - c. An offense is like a pair of glasses you wear.
 1. Everything is seen through your personal hurts.
 2. You are critical of the worship, announcements, prayer time, and teaching.
 - d. All of these things you used to enjoy.
 - e. Your attitude eventually justifies you leaving the church and going somewhere else.
 - f. You sit in this new church finding fellowship with other bitter people and waiting for the failure of the church you came from.
 - g. You thrive on rumors of dissension in your former church – you are only hurting yourself.
 - h. In the church you came from, people are still being saved, filled with the Spirit, healed and blessed and you are left out.
 - i. A few years later, this person is usually not in church at all.

Give Us A Break

1. I have buried someone on Saturday who I believe should not have died.
2. I have walked into church on Sunday morning and failed to recognize someone who walked by. The person I failed to say “hi” to is now offended.
3. Pastors are human too.
4. God doesn’t choose perfect people to fill the pulpit.
5. One woman disagreed with my teaching one day. She said, “you don’t deserve to be in the pulpit.”
 - a. I said, “you are right. And you don’t deserve to sit in the congregation.”
 - b. No one is allowed in church – the pulpit or the pew, because they deserve it.
7. If we hung a sign over the front door, “all worthy may enter” no one would come.
8. We come on the merits of Jesus and His blood, not our own works.
9. I may not wear clothes you like, but then you don’t wear clothes I like.
10. You may not like my car, but I may not like yours. People have left the church over the car I bought.
 - a. I wouldn’t leave the church if they bought a nice car.
 - b. The only thing you should care about is the quality of the word taught.
 - c. Nothing is said about the clothes the sower wore to the field or how he got there. These are side issues.
11. All that is necessary for success is a sower, seed, and ground. (a minister, quality word taught, and open hearts.)

A guard against offense – Get involved!!

Thorns and Good Ground (vs. 23-25)

The Key Verses – *“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear (keep on hearing). Then He said to them, “Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear (keep on hearing), more will be given. 25 For whoever has (ears that keep on hearing), to him more will be given; but whoever does not have (ears that keep on hearing), even what he has will be taken away from him.”*

Thorny Ground (vs. 18-19)

“Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, 19 and the cares (necessities) of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful (has no ability to produce).”

1. Stones are below the ground; thorns are above ground.
2. Passing the blessing test.
3. Testing and its source.
 - a. The adversity tests come from Satan.
 - b. The prosperity tests come from God.

1. Are you willing to keep God first and keep giving?
2. Abraham's son Isaac was put on the altar.

F. Jesus' Cross - Your Cross

"And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." Luke 14:27

1. Your cross is not Jesus' cross.
2. His cross was for sin and sickness.
3. Your cross is not your besetting sin or reoccurring sickness.
 - a. Those were on Jesus' cross.
 - b. What was on Jesus' cross will never be on yours.
 - c. What is on your cross, Jesus will never bear.
 - d. Your cross is something you are free to pick up, free to lay down, or free to never pick up at all.
 - e. Your cross is for flesh to die on.
 - f. His cross was for your salvation. Your cross is for discipleship.

Good Ground

*"But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and **bear fruit**: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."*

²¹ Also He said to them, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? ²² For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light. ²³ If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear (keep on hearing)." Mark 4:20-23

1. Fruit is the production, proof, of a disciple (John 15:8).
2. A disciple is not self-centered, but *others*-minded.
3. Only 1/4 of the ground becomes disciples (Mark 4:20-25)

G. Rewards of the Hearing Ear

"Then He said to them, "Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. ²⁵ For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him." Mark 4:24-25