

Norman C. Schwab
Yacolt EV Free
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Little Bitty Seeds

Mark 4:1-20

When I was working on a project in Bend Oregon for Pacific Gas Transmission, the company decided they wanted to fly Erin and me back to California every month. We would jet down to see Erin's family one weekend a month racking up those frequent flyer miles for a free vacation trip. We would hop on a puddle jumper at the Redmond airport and bounce over the Cascades to Portland where an Alaska airliner awaited our trip south. The Friday afternoon flight was usually jammed with business men and women. It is on this flight where I discovered possibly a Guinness Worlds Record, this flight had the worlds least attentive audience. This particular group was reeking with apathy. They have probably made the Portland to San Francisco trip hundreds of times. Look around while the stewardess is giving her safety instruction seminar and absolutely no one is even glancing her direction. The laptops and power books are buzzing. Some are drifting into an exhausted sleep, others are burning through the latest pop novel. It did not matter that the lady standing in the front of the place was attractive, spoke clearly and smiled. You could not find any greater degree of inattention. She failed to hold the audience attention for two reasons.

- 1) Nothing she said was news, everybody on the plane had heard that spiel hundreds of times.
- 2) The passengers perceived danger was so remote that the chance of their needing her information was almost zero.

What would it take for that Stewardess to be able to capture the attention of her audience and finally teach them how to operate those drop down oxygen masks? If...If the plane began to list 30 degrees to the right....If flames began to appear from both engines...If there was a noticeably rapid decrease in elevation... If the Captain came on the intercom to warn of a major mechanical failure, and please listen for further instructions...The seat backs would actually be returned to their

upright positions. Tray tables would snap shut. All focus would be directed towards the Stewardess. She would have their complete attention.

People are motivated to learn based on the degree to which the subject matter is relevant to their needs or wants. Needs and desires are cultivated in the mind, the heart, the soul. This is in the realm not of the physical or intellectual...but in the realm of the spiritual. The secular person will stop listening to a religious message for the same reasons as those frequent flyers. They view the gospel as nothing new and a warning that seems hopelessly redundant, the danger being danger distant and remote. Do you ever ask the question. Why hasn't there been a better response to the gospel?

Turn with me in your Bibles to Chapter 4 in the gospel of Mark. Jesus in the previous chapter has just radically redefined family. He answered the question. Who are those that make up the true family of God? It's not in the genes, not based on your family tree. It's not due to your intelligence or even Bible knowledge. The sisters and brothers in the family of God are all those who do the will of God. The ones who have chosen to live their lives in obedience to what Jesus would desire. Now in chapter 4 Jesus gives a parable, a story that teaches a truth, to explain why there's not a better response to the gospel. You see...hearing is actually a heart condition. Hearing depends on the condition of your heart. Your heart response is like soil. Is it well tilled and ready to receive the seed of God's word? Read with me Mark 4 verses 1-20. (READ)

Jesus is back again teaching by the sea. Again, there are great multitudes. Jesus is never impressed by large crowds. He knew that most of them would never produce the fruit of a changed life. Jesus gets into a boat to teach. That reminds us of the last chapter when He asks His disciples for help to go get a boat ready. They were on top of things here. The boat is ready and Jesus gets in, sits down and begins to teach the people. He begins to tell a story. The greatest communicators are great story tellers, painting visual pictures for the audience. Spurgeon once said that the sermon is the house and the illustrations let the light in. Jesus is the great communicator and often uses stories or parables to teach and increase His impact. This story is centered around the fate

of some seeds. The sower went out to sow. Some of the seeds fell onto the well worn foot path. Some onto the Rocky thin soiled ground. Some fell into the weeds and thistles. And some of the seeds landed into dark rich topsoil. The disciples ask Jesus. What does all this mean? verse 11-13. These verses are inserted here by the author to explain that even those closest to Jesus had difficulty fully understanding the message of Jesus. Who He was and what he was about. Their weaknesses and failure give Jesus an opportunity to teach and disciple them. We get to observe and learn from a distance.

Jesus point he makes is that 1) Hearing is a heart condition. Hearing is a heart condition. Say that with me. Hearing is a heart condition. I could repeat this message over and over each week, most of you would stop coming, but some would show up Sunday after Sunday and never really hear, because hearing is a heart condition. Ones response depends on the condition of the heart. When Jesus spoke in parables to reveal new truth about the kingdom of God. This particular one Jesus says it's important that you understand this one because its the key to the others parables. This is the age of seed sowing. Jesus is coming to usher in a new plan of bringing God and man together. Jesus spoke in parable not to deliberately withhold truth from the people. He spoke to them as much as they were able to understand. But it was difficult because they had rejected His divine identity. Until we accept the fact that Jesus is indeed God, all the rest just doesn't make any sense. The parables tested the reality of the hearer's interest. Point number one. Hearing is a heart condition.

Now lets dig into the soils. Lets dig into the various heart responses. It will give us the answer to why there is not better response to the gospel. But...lets go beyond that...We who are Christians are called to sow seed. We are exhorted by the great commission in Matthew 28 to share the good news of the gospel. As we examine these heart conditions, be thinking of people you know with the various soils and ask, how would you begin to prepare their hearts for planting the seed of God's word.

Lets start with heart condition number 1. Old Fast Lane. The hard Highway. (place piece of asphalt out) Verse 15. The sower throws out seed and it falls on the hard packed path. Lots of folks travel this

way. Lots of people have this heart condition. James Engel gives us a sample of their theology.

"God, if He exists at all, is just an impersonal moral force. Man basically has the capacity within himself to improve morally and make the right choices. Happiness consists of unlimited material acquisition. There really is no objective basis for right and wrong. The supernatural is just a figment of someone's imagination. If a person lives a "good life" then their eternal destiny is assured. The Bible is nothing other than a book written by man." This mindset has no soil in which to plant or even germinate a seed. The seeds that land on the road just sit on top of the ground. There is no penetration. Birds can easily come and eat them up. The seed of the word in harden hearts like old fast lane, are easy prey for Satan. This is the hard heart condition.

Just like those airport commuters, apathy is difficult soil to sow. They just don't care. They are so hardened the seed just bounces off when it hits them. Maybe they've been tread on for years by those who give out misinformation about the good news. It happened in Jesus day when the people would say, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth" We hear it today when the office conversation turns to religion all that comes up are the latest evil doings of the TV preachers who rampantly sin and then shed great alligator tears to rip-off money from older folks retirement. That's not at all what the gospel is about. Yet, hearts can become hard from misinformation. Some hearts are hard from down and dirty rebellion. A rebel resists the right of an authority over him. Just like kids will rebel against there parents. A hard heart rebels against God calling the shots in their life. Some hard hearts are filled with pride and self sufficiency. They have placed an excessive amount of faith in self. Hardness is not necessarily belligerence or toughness, it's indifference. She can be a very sweet, fragile 115 lb. teenager and be a spiritually rock hard rebel. Do you know anybody with a road hard heart response? How can you help to prepare their soil for the gospel?

Heart condition number 2. The shallow heart. (place rock on podium) The seed of the word has landed in the thin and rocky soil. Verse 16 Old Rocky. These are the emotional ones. These joyfully accept the word, but they don't understand the price to become a true disciple of Jesus. They exude with enthusiasm...yet when the spiritual "high" is

gone and the feeling is over..when the pressure starts hitting them at home...when the snide comments and persecution begins at work, they bow to external pressure and fade away. The sun of external pressure withers them. They show they're stripes as being shallow rooted with no depth and possessing merely a superficial knowledge of Jesus. Can you think of some of your friends who when initially were introduced to the Lord became a raging firecracker for Jesus, but sometime down the road, a few weeks, a few months a few years, when things got tough, when their faith did not pan out as a quick fix...they began to fade away. They bowed down to social pressures, public opinion and external opposition. Do you know anyone with a thin rocky soiled heart response to the Word? How would you go about brining some more topsoil into their life so that a seed could survive and flourish?

Heart condition number 3. This is the Crowded heart. (place a weed on the podium.) Nothing wrong with the seed going into either three of these soils. Look at verse 18. In fact the soil in old wild flower is pretty good stuff, the problem is all the other stuff growing in there, the weeds and thistles are stealing the nutrients necessary for growth. So the Crowded heart never produces any fruit. The crowded heart condition is able to perceive the word, but does not truly repent and remove the weeds from her heart. Too many seeds are being cared for in the crowded heart that there is no room for the good seed to grow. This is the person that wants the best of both worlds. They want to walk on the narrow road and the board road at the same time. They never give God his proper place in their life. They are choked by internal distraction. Verse 19 They put these things as the priority in their life. The concerns of the world; materialism; desire for other things. The seed is the Word. The gospel. It's not opinions, good ideas, social help, church growth strategies or self help techniques. Those are fine in their place, but they aren't seed. I have seen even good things can choke out the Word. Can you think of anyone you know with a crowded heart? How would you go about bringing that person to a fruitful life? These first three soils produce no fruit so none are true believers. II Cor. 5:17 states that whoever is in Christ is made new. Those who abide in the vine will produce fruit.

Look at soil number 4. This heart condition is fruitful. (place good topsoil on podium). Look at verse 20. They hear the Word, accept it and bear fruit. Notice true believers will produce fruit. Not all will produce the same amount of fruit, some thirty to the one seed, some sixty and some even one hundred, but all will show at least some evidence of the fruit of a changed life. Productivity depends on receptivity. The seed will die on most and thrive on some. Some hearts, Satan will snatch the Word away, others will fade with external opposition and still others will produce no fruit because of internal distraction. Don't be discouraged , even the greatest of sowers let most of the seed go to waste, but some, some will produce fruit. Hearing is a heart condition.

So how do we begin to prepare the heart soil in the lives of our friends? How can we begin to help till the hard heart of a fast lane or a Rocky? First we need to water that soul with large amounts of prayer. The Holy Spirit is going to have to soften the ground if any seed is going to take root.

How does one begin with those folks who give off the impression they are indifferent about everything. Yet, everyone cares about something. If your trying to sow a seed into a rock hard life, start where that person cares. Find out what that person truly cares and address that need. Ultimately we will find that need ultimately addressed in the Word. We may begin with a persons felt need until he can be led to the point where real needs are met in Christ. Two questions we must stick to in witnessing. Who is Jesus? and what does He want me to do?

No single approach to sowing will unlock a persons interest. A rock hardened life may require it to be softened by great pain, before they're ready to truly hear.

I talked to a guy this week who is sowing seeds at work. It happened to be a slow day, and he spent some time walking around talking, kind of catching up with the guys. This certain individual wishing to be obstinate came up to him and said, "I thought you were a Christian, why are you shooting your mouth on the bosses buck?" What was happening in this guys life? He is beginning to ask some questions. He was really asking, "What makes a difference in your life...I see an inconsistency and I want to know why? Well, the guy responded by saying "I want to thank you for being used by the Holy Spirit to shape my

character. I need that thanks. (he didn't stop there) And you know what he said? You need Jesus too. In fact your going to come with me to Promise Keepers next year! That's sowing a little bity seed in that guys life.

We tend to view evangelism as the reaping part only, but we must see it as a team. Paul said in I Cor. 3:5-9 "I planted, Apollus watered, but it was God who caused the growth." Sowing and reaping requires a team. Where can you sow a seed today? Who can you draw a little closer to God this week? Coming to Christ often involves a series of mini-decisions. A multitude of encounters by different people. For some soil your preparing it may go like this.

He's okay. I'd like to get to know him better. I feel comfortable with him. He accepts me. I'm going to find out why he's so different. It seems he gets his outlook on life from the Bible. he's a Christian, but he's Okay. Being a Christian sure has its advantages. I life his friends. I envy their confidence. It might be interesting to go to their home and study the Bible with a small group. It's a series of mini decisions. Think about who you'll want to begin asking the question, "Hey, Bob someday I'm going to ask you to a Bible study at my home." Someday is very vague but it's easy for you to judge their reaction. After four or five promises of "someday I'm going to ask.." Bob will grow accustomed to the idea of studying the Bible and wonder when your going to make good on your promise of invitation. If your going to go fishing, make sure there is a fly on the end of your line. Otherwise your just out there slapping line. God has called all of us who are believers to be faithful Gospel givers, who share the seed of the word. The harvest results are up to God. Yet, if we sow into a soil that's prepared we can reap 30, 60 possibly 100 times.