

A Heart



Condition

**The Heart Mind Connection
In Jesus' Parable**

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A Heart Condition

Mark 4:2 reads, “*Then He taught them many things by parables.*” The word parable means “to set along side,” meaning to set a spiritual truth along side a common every day truth of living. Jesus did this so that when people did their daily chores they would remember, and contemplate the spiritual truth of the parable.

The parable we are considering here is called the Parable of the Sower, which could really be called the Parable of the Soil because Jesus describes four different types of soil the seed lands on. Verse 15 says, “*Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.*” So from this we know that the different soils describe different heart conditions that the seed lands on. David Guzik says, “A parable isn’t exactly an illustration. A good teacher can illustrate by stating a truth, and then illustrating that truth through a story or an analogy. But when Jesus used parables, He didn’t start by stating a truth. Instead, the parable was like a doorway. Jesus’ listeners stood at the doorway and heard Him. If they were not interested, they stayed on the outside. But if they were interested, they could walk through the doorway and think about the truth behind the parable and what it meant to their lives. And if they didn’t understand the key to the parable, they wouldn’t understand it at all. We can imagine what different people in Jesus’ audience might have thought when He taught this parable with no explanation.”

The disciples did not understand the spiritual meaning until Jesus explained the key to them. Verse 14 says, “*The sower sows the word.*” So the seed represents the Word of God. If you miss the key you will miss the whole parable. Guzik says, “If you think the seed is love you miss the parable. If you think the seed is money you miss the parable. If you think the seed represents hard work you miss the parable. You can only understand it by understanding the key, which Jesus explained is the Word of God.”

Taking a Closer Look

Mark 4 contains a parable about how we hear the Word of God based on the condition of our hearts. This reading is divided into two sections, the parable and the explanation, and it is such an example of divine logic and order that we will simply take it as the Lord presented it and expound its meaning.

The **FIRST** heart described in this parable is the hard heart. In Mark 4:3-4 Jesus says, “*Listen!* (from the Greek *akouo* meaning to pay close attention) *Behold, a sower went out to sow. And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it.*” Now notice Jesus’ explanation privately to His disciples in verses 14-15, “*The sower sows the word. 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.*” The first heart described in this parable is the hard heart. This is the ground by the wayside, a hardened path. These paths were well-used by both man and beast, and upon this path some of the seed falls as it is being scattered. And this would have been a very common sight to Jesus’ audience. We don’t farm like this today, but picture this early farmer with me. He did not have a tractor to plow his field, nor did he have a modern mechanical planter to plant the seed. The method he used for planting his seed was to cast it abroad by hand. Now while this method dropped the seed onto the prepared ground, it also dropped it on all the ground he passed over, and this hard path was just one of the places where the seed landed. And hard ground

never really receives the seed. The seed just bounces on the hard surface and lays on top of it, ready to be plucked up by any bird passing by. And it doesn't take much imagination to see the kind of heart to which this applies. This is an example of a heart that is closed to the Word of God. It is hardened and will not even consider it. Perhaps it has been hardened by a life of sin. Perhaps it has been hardened by an educational system which denies the existence of God. But in any case, the heart is hard. This kind of person is described in Scripture when it says, "*Men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.*" (John 3:19). Sin builds a wall between the person and God, and some hearts are so callused that they are completely closed to the Gospel message.

Satan does not want the Word to remain on the soil for very long lest it find a small crack in the surface and be received, so he comes along and steals it away just like a bird. How does he do this? He does this through humanistic and secularistic reasoning. He convinces people that to be a truly modern person they must rely on existentialism, philosophy, and scientific logic. He tries to convince people that God, miracles, and heaven do not exist. So the hard-hearted person feels a prideful justification as he or she smugly dismisses the truth of God's Word. And what a tragedy this is, but such is the picture of the hard heart. The Pulpit Commentary says, "Not all who hear the gospel believe it and receive it; just as some of the seed sown fell by the wayside, on the hard footpath, where it could not penetrate the ground, but lay upon the surface, and so was picked up by the birds."

The **SECOND** heart described in this parable is the shallow heart. Jesus says in Mark 4:5-6, "*Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away.*" Now notice Jesus' explanation in verses 16-17. "*These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; 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.*" Here we have the stony ground. This is describing

ground with more rocks than soil. So when the seed is sown it germinates quickly, but because of the abundance of rocks is unable to put down roots. And when the sun comes up it scorches the plant and dries it up.

What are the characteristics of this heart? The first characteristic is that this heart does receive the word. Perhaps it receives the word quickly because it does not think about what it is receiving. Many people are not like the Bereans who searched the Scriptures daily to see if the things they heard were true. And often times when a person is quick to accept, they are quick to reject, because they were never really convinced in the first place. Francis Schaeffer said, "A man should not become a Christian until he is convinced that Christianity is true." And yet the evidence is there for any thinking man or woman to examine. Many jump on the bandwagon of anything new, thinking that something new will make them happy. There are many who think that happiness is what Christianity is all about. They believe that happiness is a sure sign of conversion, and they wrongly conclude that the Lord is no longer blessing them when trials come. But this too reveals their shallowness of heart and understanding. And this is why many turn back. They cannot endure under the trial and they begin to doubt God. The truth of the matter is that God is with you on the mountaintop and He is with you in the valley. He is with you in good times and He is with you in bad times, and He has promised never to leave you or forsake you, but He has never promised that everything will be easy.

Notice the result of the shallow heart. First affliction and persecution comes. It is like the sun; it rises in due time, and even though the shallow heart has received the word quickly and gladly, and has even endured for awhile, this is not enough. Salvation is not counted to those who merely endure for a while. The Bible says that those who endure to the end will be saved. When affliction and persecution comes those with shallow hearts are quickly offended, and they immediately fall away. They fall away because they had no depth of root to draw the life-sustaining moisture from deep within the earth. And many pass through the

church this way, and our church books are full of shallow-hearted absent people today. The Pulpit Commentary again says, “Not all who hear and believe persevere in the faith; some fall away; like the seed sown on rocky ground, which springs up indeed, but for want of depth of soil puts forth no root, and is soon scorched by the rising sun, and, being without root, withers away.”

The **THIRD** heart described in this parable is the cluttered heart. In Mark 4:7 Jesus said, “*And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.*” Now notice Jesus’ explanation in verses 18-19, “*Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.*” Here we have soil that is full of weeds and thorns. They may have been cleared away on the surface, but underneath they are just waiting to spring up when the weather turns warm, and the good seed lands there as well. Notice what happens, God’s Word is choked to death by the thorns. Notice what the Pulpit Commentary says about this heart soil. “Not all who show faith bring forth the fruit of good works; like the seed sown among the thorns, which, growing up together with the thorns is choked out.”

This is a heart caught up in the affairs of this world. Some have characterized it as a materialistic heart—or a busy heart, one which adds Jesus as just another activity when there’s enough time left over from all the other activities. This kind of heart is not like the other two we have described, It does receive the word; It does put down roots; Its problem is not that it doesn’t want God—it does. Its problem is that it wants God along with everything else. Notice three things in the text. First are “*the cares of the world.*” These are the concerns that occupy our daily lives. Food, clothing, and a place to live, the very things Jesus told us not to worry about. But unfortunately most of us are not satisfied with what we need, we want more, and so we give ourselves to getting what we want, and there’s a big space between what we need and what we want. And getting those things takes time, and the time we give to other things is time we do not give to God. Second is “*the deceitfulness*

of riches.” Notice that it does not say that money is the problem. Money is not our problem. Rather it is the love of money and the obsession for more money that’s the problem, and the time we spend chasing after more and more riches chokes God out of our lives. Third are *“the desires for other things.”* What do you think that could possibly mean? These are all those things we possess which end up possessing us. It’s like buying a big tiger that you have to keep feeding. It’s the entertainment which pushes God out of our lives. It’s the activities which come before God and the church. You know what I’m talking about. It’s all of those activities which the world schedules, which we think we must be involve in to have a meaningful life. It’s the busyness that chokes out the Word of God.

The **FOURTH** heart described in this parable is the fruitful heart. Mark 4:8 says, *“But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.”* Jesus explains the fourth part of this parable in verse 20, *“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.”* This is the good ground, which was broken up and cultivated. It was weeded and prepared to receive the seed, which, when it came put down deep roots and produced a good crop. What are its characteristics? There are several, and these are the traits we should seek to possess. Hosea 10:12 says, *“Sow to yourselves in righteousness and reap in mercy. Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord until He comes to rain righteousness upon you.”* It is only as our hearts are plowed and cultivated that they are ready to receive the Word of God. They must be prepared and we have a part to play in that preparation. In 2 Chronicles 12:14 it says of Rehoboam that *“he did evil because he did not prepared his heart to seek the Lord.”* Later in chapter 19 it says of Jehoshaphat that he, *“prepared his heart to seek God.”* But it also says, *“the people had not prepared their hearts unto the God of their fathers,”* and disaster followed.

What all of this speaks to is preparation of the heart; hearts that are broken up and cultivated, which requires a daily

dying to self; a daily commitment to serve Jesus Christ; a daily acknowledgment of our utter dependency on Him. It means that we desire to do His will and keep our hearts open before Him. And just as ground can grow hard so can hearts; and just as ground needs to be broken up so again do hearts. Vance Havner wrote, "If ground could think or feel, it would resent the plow. And the same is true for us. Sometimes, we resent the hand of God at work to break us, but it is precisely what we need." And as we set ourselves to seek the Lord and to avoid those things which cause the Word to be unfruitful, we will be productive and bare fruit for the Kingdom.

The Pulpit Commentary says of this last soil, "These are those who receive the gospel in the love of it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, some a hundred; and this on account of the more ready co-operation of the free-will of man with the sovereign grace of God. The whole parable marks a gradation. In the first case the seed produces nothing; in the second it produces only the blade; in the third it is near the point of producing fruit, but fails to bring forth to perfection, and in the fourth it yields fruit."

The Heart Mind Connection

I was visiting one of my parishioners in a nursing home in Seattle when an elderly gentleman at the same table blurted out, in a loud voice, "I have a heart condition." This was followed by a lady from across the table who blurted back, "I'm glad I don't have a heart condition." And at that moment the thought struck me, we all have a heart condition, in a spiritual sense as well as a physical sense.

The heart is a hollow muscular organ Inside the chest that pumps blood to all parts of the body. It's the size of your fist and weighs about 10 ounces. It beats approximately 75 times a minute, and with each beat it discharges about 4 ounces of blood; that's 3,000 gallons a day or 80 train cars a year. But with all this activity, the heart as an organ is unable to think or reason. And though the physiology of the heart was not understood by our forefathers,

people have understood its importance to the body for a much longer time. They knew that it was necessary to sustain life, but they also mistakenly believed that it was where the conscience resides. And since the emotion of love was believed to come from the heart, its shape, an upside down pear came to be the symbol of love.

How the heart was viewed from the beginning of time through the Dark Ages by different ancient cultures seems to have formed much of our modern day thinking. The ancient Chinese believed the heart was the seat of intelligence. The ancient Greeks believed the heart was the source of thought. Aristotle believed the heart held the soul. Homer spoke of man “who believes one thing in his heart and speaks another.” For Abrahamic religions, a person connects with God through their heart. So with no understanding of how the brain functions, they could only focus on the heart. They knew the beating in the chest signified life. They also knew beating harder and faster corresponded with fear, and that upon death the beating stopped. The ancients elevated the heart to the position held by the brain. Science and medicine have shaped our present-day understanding that the brain is the control center for the human body, and the heart is a pump that works hand in hand with the brain and keeps the rest of the body functioning properly. So yes, they do have a symbiotic relationship of needing each other.

As we look at Jesus’ parable in Mark 4 some questions immediately arise. The main one is, What is the connection between the heart and the mind? They are two completely different organs, and most of us have grown up believing that they function separately from one another. But research is telling us that the heart is hard-wired to the brain and that they are inseparably connected. I have always believed that our emotions come from our brain, but Professor David Paterson, Ph.D. of *Oxford University* believes there is more to it than that. He says, “The brain is not the only organ that produces emotions. This is because the heart actually contains neurons similar to those in the brain, and these fire in conjunction with the brain.” What Professor Paterson seems to be

saying is, the heart responds to stimuli from the brain. A simple example would be the emotion of blushing which starts with a thought that quickly reverberates in the heart. Another is the emotion of fear which starts in the brain and immediately sends the heart racing. Researchers from *Thomas Jefferson University* tell us that chronic stress triggers the brain to send signals to the heart, leading to increased heart rate, higher blood pressure, and a surge in cortisol levels. Today we have many expressions related to the heart, such as, “Having a change of heart” or “It’s with a heavy heart,” and you can probably think of many more. Collectively, these expressions assume that the heart is not only an organ that pumps blood but also aids in the processing of emotions. While these expressions and metaphors about the heart reflect centuries of folk wisdom, it seems that recent discoveries in neurocardiology are proving some of them true.

Dr. Thomas R. Verny says, “The heart acts as a sophisticated information encoding and processing center. What is truly surprising is the discovery that the heart also functions as an endocrine organ. In other words, like the thyroid gland or the adrenal gland, it produces several hormones, including the cardiac natriuretic peptide. This hormone exerts its effect on the blood vessels, the kidneys, the adrenal glands, and on a large number of regulatory regions in the brain. It was also found that the heart contains cells known as intrinsic cardiac adrenergic cells, which release noradrenaline and dopamine. More recently, it was determined that the heart also secretes oxytocin, commonly known as the love or bonding hormone. Concentrations of oxytocin in the heart were found to be as high as those in the brain.” (*Inside the Secrets of the Heart, Psychology Today*, Feb 4, 2022)

New Scientist Live says, “It is commonly believed that the brain is the command center, controlling thoughts, speech, and function. The heart pumps blood throughout the body, providing a life-sustaining supply of oxygen and nutrients to every major organ. However, emerging research is painting a different picture, one where the brain and heart engage in a profound, intricate dialogue, influencing our overall well-being. Clinical evidence

is mounting that cardiovascular health affects cognitive health, suggesting that preventive efforts for one translate to the other.” *Harvard Medicines* Elizabeth Gehrman says, “Heart-Brain Health is a two way street.”

So Where Does This Leave Us?

There are a number of words in both Hebrew and Greek that are translated “mind.” In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for “mind” is often the same word for “heart.” In the New Testament, the Greek word for “heart” can also refer to the “mind,” and from ancient times the distinction was not understood. In the parable of the Sower the seed lands on four different soil types, which are thought to be four different heart conditions, but in reality it would be describing four different mind conditions since the heart responds to stimuli that originates in the mind. Remember Professor David Paterson saying the heart “fires in conjunction with the brain.” So the parable would be describing a hard mind; a shallow mind; a cluttered mind; and a fruitful mind. And I see an abundant amount of evidence in the Bible that tells us that sin starts in the mind. Let’s look at some of them—

Philippians 2:5 reads,

*“Let this **mind** be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”*

My response to that verse comes in the form of a question. Is it really possible to have a mind like Jesus? After all, the Bible tells us that Jesus is God (John 1) and a member of the Godhead (Colossians 2:9). And yes it’s true, He came to earth and took on a fleshly body like me in order to save me, but Scripture also tells us He did not sin. Hebrews 4:15 says, *“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”* 2 Corinthians 5:21 reads, *“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”* So back to my question, Is it really possible to have a mind like Jesus? The Apostle Paul wrote this

under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16), so I have to trust the Holy Spirit and say it is possible or He would not have stated it the way He did.

The idea behind this text is to have the same mindset or thinking that Christ had. Paul is talking about Jesus, as God, giving up His glory (Philippians 2:6) and humbling Himself to become a man and to die on a cross (Philippians 2:7–8). Jesus gave Himself up as an expression of love and was willing to lower Himself to express that love. As Jesus Himself put it, no one has greater love than to give his life for another (John 15:13). Paul is challenging his readers to think like Jesus and be willing to lower oneself for the benefit of the other. That is what it means to have the same mind as Christ Jesus. Let's look at another verse—

Colossians 3:2 says,

*“Set your **mind** on things above, not on things on the earth.”*

To set one's mind on something is to choose to think about it. This verse tells me that I have a part to play in overcoming sin. What is my part? To choose to set my mind on spiritual things. God has given every created being the power of choice, and choosing to follow Him is the one thing He will not do for us. If He were to choose for us, we would lose our free will, and free will is essential to the whole plan of salvation. Jesus became one of us to take our sins and die in our place. Our part in this is to cooperate with Him by making good choices. The world is full of evil everywhere we look, and to not be taken in by that evil we must choose to set our mind on heavenly things.

How are we to set our minds on things above while living on this earth? It takes effort on our part. We must literally “set our mind” by making a conscious decision. We are inundated with messages that promote carnal behavior. What we listen to on the radio; watch on TV and the movies; read in the newspaper and magazines has a direct effect on our mind. We are constantly bombarded with values that are earthy. Even if the messages we receive are not overtly immoral, they exclude God and prioritize

things that feed our fallen nature. If we want to be directed “from above,” we must make an effort to counteract the messages that are all around us. To set our mind on things above, we must meditate on God’s Word, attend church, listen to uplifting music, and read things that turn our heart toward God.

I have a book in my library entitled *Our High Calling*, and on page 337 it reads, “Those who would have the wisdom which is from God should shut their eyes, that they may see and learn no evil. They should close their ears, lest they hear that which is evil, and obtain that knowledge which would stain their purity of thoughts and acts. They should guard their tongues, lest they utter corrupt communications, and guile be found in their mouths. All are accountable for their actions while in this world, and all have power to control their actions. If they are weak in virtue and purity of thoughts and acts, they can obtain help from the Friend of the helpless. Jesus is acquainted with all the weaknesses of human nature, and if entreated, will give strength to overcome all temptations.”

Romans 8:5 says,

*“For those who live according to the flesh set their **minds** on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.”*

Tara Leigh Cobble wrote these inspiring words, “*Two natures beat within my breast. The one is foul, the one is blessed. The one I love, the one I hate, but the one I feed will dominate.*” The natural outcome of setting our mind on anything is to actually practice that thing. In verse 6 Paul says, “*For to be carnally **minded** is death, but to be spiritually **minded** is life and peace.*” We cannot choose which temptations the enemy presents to us, but we can control the thoughts we choose to dwell on. And we will either see sin as “fun,” or we will see sin as “the thing that cuts us off from eternal life.” By our thoughts and choices we will be feeding either our spiritual nature or our fallen nature. Paul acknowledged these two natures in Romans 7:25, “*Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our*

Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.” The nature that we choose to feed is the one that will dominate, and Paul told us in Romans 8:6 that to be carnally minded is to choose death.

Success in the Christian life means growing closer to God. The key aspect in this pursuit is the fight against temptation. Temptation is not sin when it is dismissed, and only becomes sin when one chooses to entertain it. How does the enemy tempt us?—by suggesting evil thoughts into our subconscious mind. Therefore sin starts in the mind, and we must be on guard at all times. Ask yourself this question, Where are choices made? They are made in our mind. A thought comes before an act, which must mean that sin starts in the mind even before an act is committed or a word is spoken. Acts and words are the outward, public revealing of a decision or choice already made within.

Bob’s Struggle

Bob (not his real name) called the church office for an appointment. When he arrived he told me he was struggling with sinful sexual thoughts. He told me they were not just an occasional thought, but non-stop every day type thoughts, and he was asking for help in getting past this. He said the devil was not giving him a moments rest. I ask him if he was viewing pornography on his computer or phone. He reluctantly said yes. This is a bigger problem than one might think, and I believe that sex may be the devil’s BIG temptation. And this is not just a man problem. Over the years I’ve talked with a number of ladies who were struggling with this as well. I prayed with Bob and then reviewed much of what you have been reading in this book. Tara Cobble seems to have nailed it, *“Two natures beat within my breast. The one is foul, the one is blessed. The one I love, the one I hate, but the one I feed will dominate.”* So the first thing to do in gaining victory is to pray and ask God for His help. The second is to stop feeding that lower nature. Bob told me he was ashamed to even talk with God about this, and I reminded him that God already knows. There is nothing

that we can say, do, or think that God is not aware of before hand. Psalm 139:1-4 reads, “O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.” 1 Corinthians 3:20 says, “The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise...” So, if God already knows everything, it’s time to be honest with Him and humbly ask Him for His help.

Billy Graham said it best. “When temptation comes, one needs to turn their back on the temptation and pray until it is gone.” How many times have you been in the heat of temptation, and while you were trying to pray you continued thinking about the temptation? They say the human mind changes focus about every three to five seconds. Graham said, turn your back to the temptation, focus briefly on another object, and then you will not struggle with the evil thought while you are praying.

Bob told me that he had asked God to remove any desire for sinful sex, but he felt that God was not answering that prayer. I told him that if God were to choose for him, he would be losing his free will, and free will is essential to the plan of salvation. I encouraged him to start his day with devotions and prayer, and end the day the same way. I encouraged him to memorize Scripture that he can recite during the day when temptation comes. This will help in refocusing as he asks God for strength when he is tempted. I encouraged him to make this a daily practice, and God will help him—and victory will come over time.

Romans 12:2 says,

*“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your **mind**, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”*

Here the Apostle Paul is urging the Christians in Rome, and us today, to be transformed from the inside out by the renewing of the mind. Let’s define two of the important words in this verse,

“conformed” and “transformed.” The word conform can mean to press into a mold. When something is pressed into a mold it takes on the shape or look of the mold. When a person is conforming to the world they are being pressed or shaped into the pattern or ways of the world. Likewise when a person chooses to conform to the likeness of Christ, they are being shaped into His likeness. The word transform means to be changed. I grew up with a couple of guys who used to say they hated God and wanted nothing to do with the church. After graduation we went our separate ways and did not see one another for many years. When we finally did meet up again, I was surprised to see how their lives had been changed. They clearly had been converted and transformed, and spoke openly about their relationship with Jesus Christ.

How can I help this transformation to take place? Clarence Haynes writes, “Guard what you let in. This means to be careful about the conversations you allow yourself to be dragged into. This also means to be mindful of the influence the people you let into your life have over you.” He goes on to say, “Guard what you put in. This means you must be intentional in what you watch, listen to and read. All these things feed your mind and are either helping your transformation or they are hurting it.” He finishes with Philippians 4:8, *“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of a good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”*

Matthew 5:8,

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Jesus spoke these words during the Sermon on the Mount. What did He mean when He said them? The Greek word for “pure” means to be “clean and blameless.” It also means to be “unstained from guilt.” The word can refer specifically to something that is purified by fire or by pruning. For a vine to produce fruit, it must be pruned, and those who are “pure,” are those who have been

declared innocent because of the work of Jesus, and who are being sanctified by His refining fire and His pruning.

The Greek word for “heart” in this verse can be applied to the spiritual center of life. It is where our thoughts and desires reside. So, to be pure in heart means to be blameless in our minds and our thoughts. A pure mind has no hypocrisy, and no hidden motives. The pure mind is marked by transparency in our desire to please God in all things. It is more than an external purity of behavior; it is an internal purity of ones entire being. Psalm 51:10 says, “*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*” To have a pure heart begins with having a pure mind and pure thoughts.

Psalm 24:3-4 says, “*Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.*” This Psalm seems to describe the ideal worshiper. “Clean hands” refers to godly works, and a “pure heart” (or mind) refers to inner morality. When our mind/heart is right, it leads to right actions. This is the person that God will allow into his presence.

Ruth’s Struggle

Stacy (not her real name) asked if she could meet with me for a moment after church. When we met she told me how Ruth (not her real name) had ruined her life by the vicious stories she was telling. And when she told me the things Ruth was saying, I have to admit they came across as being very malicious. I asked if she had spoken to Ruth. She said she had tried, but Ruth would have nothing to do with it. I told Stacy that I would speak to Ruth and arrange a meeting with the three of us. Now I’ve been around long enough to know that things are not always what they seem on the surface. Gossip is usually highly exaggerated and often not true at all. In the meeting I listened as the two told their side of the story. Stacy extended her hand to Ruth and said, “I forgive you,” with no response from Ruth. At that point I asked to meet with Ruth alone.

Catherine Marshall wrote, “forgiveness is releasing another from your own personal judgement.” Jesus said in Matthew 7:1, “*Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you.*” Romans 2:1 says, “*Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.*” Romans 14:13 says, “*Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in your brother’s way.*” A very inspirational writer once wrote, “The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to His perfect nature.” (Steps to Christ page 64). From that statement it would seem that the one who is gossiping is not drawing closer to Jesus.

I told Ruth that if we could see ourselves as we really are, and then see God as He really is, it would humble us and it would be difficult to point a finger at another child of God. At this the dam broke and Ruth began to weep. She told me how she had grown up in a family that thrived on gossip. She told me nothing was off limits and everyone was fair game, including the pastor, and this had become a way of life for her whole family. She told me her father used to say, “Don’t let the truth get in the way of a good story.” She told me she had tried to stop, but couldn’t.

Steps to Christ page 18 says, “It is impossible for us, of ourselves, to escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken. Our hearts are evil and we cannot change them.” There has to be a power working from within for change to be made, and that power is Jesus Christ. Apart from Him we will never change. I shared with Ruth the best way that I know of to gain victory. I encouraged her to start her day with devotions and prayer, and end the day the same way. Memorize Scripture that she can recite during the day when temptation comes. This will help in refocusing as she asks God for strength when she is tempted. I encouraged her to make this decision each day, and God will help her—and victory will come over time.

I'm happy to say that Ruth went to Stacy (and several others) and asked forgiveness, and asked for help in overcoming the terrible sin of gossip. The last I heard Ruth and Stacy had become the best of friends.

Gossip is one of the most destructive sins, so for you the reader, I'm going to share an event from a Christian Leadership Conference that I attended. One exercise our group participated in showed us just how much a story can change when it is passed from one person to another. Ten people were taken from the large group and isolated in a small room. Then a two paragraph story was read aloud to the large group. One person from the large group was picked at random and asked to meet one person from the isolated group in the hall, and repeat the story from memory. The person from the isolated group, who had just heard the story for the first time in the hall, then returned to the large group and repeated in front of everyone what he had just heard in the hallway. He was then ushered back out to the hall to repeat the story again to a second person from the isolated group. This second person then told what he had just heard to the large group, and so on. This was repeated until the story had passed through all ten people. It was amazing how much that story changed in the hallway as it was passed from one person to another. By the third person the story was not even recognizable anymore. By the tenth person everyone was holding their side with laughter.

It was funny to see that story change in that conference, but in real life, it's not funny at all. Many people have been damaged for life by gossip passing from one person to another. When we gossip about someone, we become directly responsible for what we pass on. In Matthew 12:36 Jesus said, *"I say unto you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgement. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."* Theodore Epp said, "Not only is it wrong to murder a person, but it is just as wrong to murder the character of a person. How the Lord must be grieved that so much of this is done, even by Christians."

2 Corinthians 11:3 says,

“But I fear, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ”

Paul is addressing the church at Corinth, and encouraging them not to be seduced away from their commitment to Christ. His fear is that false teachers will come and preach a different message than the one he proclaimed. He said these teachers are like the serpent in the garden tempting Eve to sin. In our verse Paul warns the church that their “minds” can be led astray. And this is a serious charge. The key word in the last part of verse 3 is the word translated “simplicity.” The primary meaning of the Greek word is “single.” I think the idea of singleness of mind is especially appropriate here as Paul is discussing a battle that is going on for control of the mind. And make no mistake, the battle is to control your mind and your way of thinking. In contrast, if we are single minded and focused on Christ, we will be devoted to Him in our devotions and worship, and give Him the glory in everything. Barnes says, “The mind is corrupted when it is filled with unholy plans, and purposes, and desires.”

“Sometimes people insist that wrong thoughts don’t always lead to wrong actions, but I disagree. Wrong actions always begin with wrong thoughts...Entertaining a wrong thought is as bad as doing a wrong deed. That’s key because it’s far too easy to think we’re not sinning merely because we’re not acting on a sinful thought. Here’s the fact—the thought itself falls short of the glory of God. When we entertain it, the thought muddies our relationship with the Lord. The thought itself occupies our mind and has the power to knock us off course.” (Louie Giglio, *Don’t Give The Enemy A Seat At Your Table*, page 80)

Mark 7:21-23 says,

“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.”

Before an act of stealing takes place, the thought of stealing has already happened in the mind. Before an act of adultery takes place, the thought of adultery has already happened in the mind. This is true of any sin—murder, idolatry, fornication, blasphemy, pride, gossip, covetousness, etc. Thoughts come before actions, and “heart” here refers to the mind. The act of sin is wrong, but the thought of sin is where the action originates; we are “defiled” by entertaining evil thoughts. So does this mean that when I have a bad thought that I have already sinned? No, it doesn’t mean that. Remember what we said earlier—temptation is not sin when it is dismissed, and only becomes sin when one chooses to entertain it.

James 1:14-15,

“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”

Verse 13 says, “Let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.” James makes clear here that God is not the source of temptation, and He does not tempt anyone to do evil. We as humans were born into sin and we will feel the pull to disobey God and be drawn away from Him. Where does the temptation come from? Satan is the source of temptation and sin, and the Apostle is clear here that we are drawn away by our own desires. In 1 John 1:9 we read, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Then the next verse (1 John 2:1) says, “My little children, these things I write unto you, that you sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” God’s desire is that we make right choices and be free from sin, but if we do sin we can come to Him for forgiveness. James 1:15 warns that the consequence of giving in to our desire, or falling into sin, will result in death if it continues unconfessed and unrepented of. Sin brings deadly consequences, and the death spoken of here will be permanent and eternal. But 2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God is “longsuffering toward us, not willing

that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” The lesson here is to not push God away until eternal death is the result.

James 4:8,

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

We are all sinners, and James calls us to clean our hands. He calls us double-minded people—trying to serve both self and God. He pleads with us to purify our hearts. The idea here is to completely turn from our sin, to resolve that we will serve God, and begin again with Him. That is what true repentance is.

What does it mean to draw near to God? We have to seek God in order to know Him, and James encourages us to draw closer to Him, and promises that as we do that He will move closer to us. How do we draw near to God? May I suggest that you start your day with quiet worship and prayer. Pray often during the day and then end your day with God’s Word and prayer.

What does James mean here by “double-minded”? He is talking about a person who is pulled in two completely different directions. Dan Delzell says, “A double-minded Christian is trying to have a relationship with Jesus Christ while holding onto a particular sinful obsession. It is a mental obsession and distraction, and it may even have a physical aspect. But it’s a miserable way to attempt to live the Christian life.” He goes on to say, “Satan has been at his craft for many centuries, and just as he knew what strings to pull with Adam and Eve, he knows how to lead believers to become double-minded. Satan hates to see believers fully surrendered to the Lord. He knows from past experience that when a Christian is fully surrendered, God is able to work more deeply in their life.”

James 1:8 says, *“a double-minded man, (is) unstable in all his ways.”* Seth Scott writes, “Double-minded people are easily swayed by doubt or uncertainty, which is the opposite of a follower of God. In the same way that multi-taskers feel more efficient

while actually performing more poorly, a double-minded person is not just inefficient with each focus but lacks the fortitude necessary to receive the blessing of wisdom because the pursuit of wisdom requires faith that is whole and undoubting. A double-minded man hedges his bets, attempting to maintain a grip on both independence and dependence, but dependence on God is only dependence when it is complete.”

Looking at Jesus’ Parable Again

The heart conditions (soil types) mentioned in Mark 4 are really talking about the mind, and one must understand that when the Bible talks about the mind, it is referring to more than just our thoughts. I believe it also means our understanding and disposition. I remember a commercial years ago that said, “A mind is a terrible thing to waste.” As Christians when we think about that statement, we need to understand how important our mind is to our whole being and what a tragedy it would be to waste it.

The **FIRST** soil type in the parable is the hard heart or mind. In Mark 4:3-4 Jesus says, “*Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it.*” So what would cause a person’s heart or mind to become hard? The short answer is—sin, especially continual, repeated and unrepentant sin. Sins that are not repented of have a cumulative and desensitizing effect on the conscience, making it difficult to distinguish between right and wrong. We just read 1 John 1:9 that says, “*If we confess our sins, He [Jesus] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*” However sin that goes unconfessed builds up and in time hardens the conscience toward God. Paul speaks of this in 1 Timothy 4:1-2, “*Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron.*” Scripture makes it clear that if we continue to engage in sin, there will come a time when God will give us over to the life we have chosen. Pharaoh’s hard heart was caused

by his pride and arrogance. Even in the face of tremendous proofs of God's powerful hand at work, Pharaoh's hardened heart/mind caused him to deny the sovereignty of the one, true God.

What then is the antidote for a hardened mind? To start with we must recognize the effect that this spiritual disease has on us. God can heal any heart, and will start that healing process when we repent of our sins. But true repentance is more than simply a feeling or determination. Repentance manifests itself in a changed life. After repenting of our sins, a hard mind begins to be cured when we study God's Word and make a determined effort to resist temptation. Psalm 119:9-11 reads, *"How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments. Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You."* If we are to live life to the fullest as God intended, we need to study and obey God's written Word, which not only keeps a heart soft and pure but allows us to be "blessed" in whatever we do. James 1:25 says, *"But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does."*

The **SECOND** soil type in the parable is the shallow heart or mind. In Mark 4:5-6 Jesus says, *"Some (seed) fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away."* So what would cause a Christian to have a shallow heart or mind? This is describing a lot of people who call themselves Christians. Beth Bullington lists eight things a shallow Christian does. See if any of these eight describe you—

1. Purchase a Bible but don't bother to read it.
2. Talk about prayer but don't bother to pray.
3. Keep all your money for yourself.
4. Attend church only when it fits your schedule.
5. Do not sign up to serve in any way.
6. Don't bother to let people know you are a Christian.

7. Do not commit to a small group or Bible study.
8. Don't bother looking deep within your own heart.

Steven Cole describes a shallow person as one “where God is not the center of their life.” In the parable the seed did briefly take root so it is describing a person who wants to be a follower of God, but lacks the commitment to stay the course. They settle into a routine that includes going to church as long as there isn't something “better” to do. They are more focused on having a good time in life. They profess to be Christians, but they have no burden for the lost and a weak desire to serve God. They are living basically for themselves.

The parable serves both as an encouragement to Jesus' followers and a warning to His hearers. The encouragement to His followers is that when we see people respond superficially to the gospel and later fall away, we should not be discouraged because Jesus often had the same response. The problem was certainly not in His preaching, but in the audience's hearing. The warning to those who hear the parable, of course, is to take it to heart so that we avoid a superficial faith. Whatever the current state of our heart, we can appeal to God to grant us a new heart so that we will hold fast to Him and bear fruit with perseverance. Clearly, Jesus was not teaching some sort of fatalism, that the kinds of soils are fixed forever. By God's grace, a person can change.

The **THIRD** soil type in the parable is the cluttered heart or mind. In Mark 4:7 Jesus said, “*And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.*” So what is it that will choke the Word of God from our lives? Again this is not describing an atheist because the seed does take root and begins to produce a crop. Jesus likens this scenario to people who hear the gospel but are distracted by “*the cares of the world*” and “*the deceitfulness of riches.*”

There are examples in the Bible of those who hear the gospel and seem to accept it, but are then distracted and drawn away by what the world has to offer. The most obvious offender in the Bible is Judas. He followed Jesus for three years, but then betrayed

Him for “the deceitfulness of riches.” (Matthew 26:14–16). The thorns here can be anything that draws us away from and chokes out our relationship with Jesus Christ. Mark 4:19 says that the thorns “*choke the word*” so that the sprout does not bear fruit. This suggests that the Word has some effect on the person who hears it, but not to the point of a saving faith. The reason why the word does not leave an abiding impression is because their hearts are not prepared to receive it. The fault is in themselves, not in the Word of God. Some are careless forgetful hearers—it goes in one ear and out the other. Others have their convictions overpowered by their life-choices, and they lose the good impressions the Word has made upon them, so that they get no abiding good from it.

The **FOURTH** soil type in the parable is the fruitful heart. Mark 4:8 says, “*But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.*” This is the good ground that has been broken up and cultivated, and receives the seed and brings forth a crop for the harvest into God’s kingdom. This is the heart condition that we all should be striving to attain.

Quoting Steven Cole, “Just as a seed has life in it, so the Word of God is alive and can impart life to those who are spiritually dead. Just as a seed has great power in it, so that it can sprout and grow to the point that eventually it cracks the foundation of a house, so the Word of God can germinate in the human heart and do a mighty work of transformation. Just as a seed can produce a tree that bears much fruit which gives nourishment, sustains life, and in turn produces more seeds to produce more trees and fruit, so the Word of God can bear fruit in human lives.” As we hear and obey God’s Word, truth becomes virtue in our lives. But those whose hearts are hard, shallow or distracted don’t gain any lasting benefit from hearing truth. So let’s make every effort to make the soil of our hearts receptive to God’s Word. Do we have a part to play in this? Yes. Think about how fruitful your Christian life has been and how fruitful you want it to be in the future. God is not going to force Himself on us. We each have a part to play in this process, and having a pure heart or mind is where it all starts.

So the question is, Do I see myself in this parable? And is it really possible for me (being painfully aware of my own sinfulness) to have a heart like the good soil in the parable? Is it really possible for me to have victory over the sins in my life? The answer is YES and YES!

Does Any of This Really Work?

Someone asks, “The message of this book sounds good, but on a practical, down to earth level, does it really work? And my answer back is, “It works if you choose to work it.” It works if you dedicate yourself—each day—sometimes moment by moment to following through. You may stumble, but don’t just lay there and give up. Stand up, brush yourself off, ask for forgiveness and press ahead. Anyone who is struggling with temptation will tell you that it is a battle, but victory is yours through Jesus Christ—if you don’t give up.

1 Timothy 6:12,

“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life.”

The same Gospel that brings peace with Jesus Christ also brings war with sin. If you think the Christian walk is going to be a breeze, you had better think again. The enemy is ready and preparing a trap that is custom made for you. Does this mean that you are doomed to fail? Not at all. Remember that when temptation comes you have a choice—to dismiss it—or to entertain it. It turns into sin only when you choose to entertain it.

Ephesians 6:11,

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

The “armor of God” is an often used metaphor for the Bible. It is only with every piece of the armor of God that a believer can adequately stand against the schemes of the Devil. Just as a soldier

would not enter battle with a partial suit of armor, a believer will not be as successful in spiritual battle unless every part of God's armor is included.

Matthew 26:41,

“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Jesus here is urging His disciples to watch and pray. He wants them to not fall prey to temptation. I believe He was talking about the temptation to run from the danger they would soon face in the Garden. He acknowledges that their spirit is willing to do what is right, but their flesh—their desires—their appetites—their urges are weak (Romans 7:22–25). Remember, to be tempted is not sin, but when we fail we have no one else to blame but ourselves (1 Corinthians 10:13).

1 Peter 2:11,

“Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.”

We are engaged in spiritual warfare, and in order to gain victory during our time on this earth, we are to abstain from fleshly lusts and carnal desires, which Peter warns will “*war against the soul.*” We need to be able to say “No” to the continuous pull of the flesh and our sinful carnal nature. The greatest battle in this life for every believer is the ongoing fight against the lusts of our old sinful nature. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit, day-by-day, that we can overcome the temptations and trials of this life.

Hebrews 12:4,

“You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.”

Shortly before this verse Paul was speaking about running a race. In this verse he shifts to a battle in an arena, and his point

is that whatever form the battle may take the conflict must carry on, and an element of effort and endurance must be there in the Christian life.

Additional Verses To Consider

Psalm 26:2,

“Examine me, O Lord, and try me; test my mind and my heart.”

Romans 8:7,

“The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so.”

Romans 1:28,

“And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper.”

Jeremiah 17:10,

“I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.”

James 4:7,

“Submit therefore to God. Resist the Devil and he will flee from you.”

Winning The War In Your Mind

Here are a collection of random quotes from Craig Groeschel’s New York Times bestseller, *Winning The War In Your Mind*—

“I swat at the swarm of thoughts flitting around my head and remember that I am not a victim of my own mind. I have power

over my thoughts. I am not captive to them. With God's help, I can make them captive to me." (Page 14)

"We must allow God to be the Master of our minds." (Page 18)

"Who you are today is a result of your thoughts in the past. Who you become in the future will reflect what you think about today." (Page 20)

"If you are going to change your life, you have to change your thinking. Christianity is not about behavior modification, but rather life transformation." (Page 35)

"There is a war going on for control of your mind. You don't have what it takes to win that war. Neither do I. You know it because you've tried to change your thinking, tried to change your life. You've done everything you can, but you always end up back in the same place. The power you need to change is a power you do not have." (Page 36).

The good news is that God is ready to renew your mind by leading you to a knowledge of the truth' (2 Timothy 2:25)." (Page 45)

"The battle we are in is especially insidious because it's invisible. We cannot see the enemy." (Page 50)

"Let's talk about how our brain works. Every thought you have produces a neurochemical change in your mind. Your brain literally redesigns itself around that thought. Neurons link together to create messages. The same message sent multiple times will create a neural pathway, which makes a thought easier to think and makes it easier for your body to send that same message again." (Page 67)

"Your brain is designed to look for patterns and create neurological pathways to help you keep thinking the things you keep thinking,

and as you think that thought or do that thing again and again, it becomes effortless.” (Page 69)

“The more you do something, the more natural it becomes.” (Page 70)

“We would be wise to recognize these mental ruts we repeatedly travel that divert us from the path we know God wants us to be on.” (Page 71)

“Unless we choose to break the pattern of wrong thinking, our lives will continue moving in the wrong direction.” (Page 77)

“We need to look to God’s Word. That’s the weapon God gives us for the battle we are fighting. We must choose specific Bible verses and create new neural pathways. By using God’s Word we will create a new trench of truth.” (Page 87)

Where The Rubber Meets The Road

1 John 3:4 says,

“Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.”

Paul understood the sin of lusting by what the Ten Commandments had to say about coveting. I think it’s time that we define sin from God’s Word. 1 John 3:4 defines sin as breaking God’s Law. That is the Bible definition of sin. You may hear other human definitions, but the only one that really matters is God’s definition, and you will not find a different definition in the Bible. Romans 7:7 reads, *“What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’”*

DailyVerse says, “The knowledge of sin comes through the Law. It is the consummate tool that identifies and exposes sin.

Once we have a knowledge of the Law, we have no alternative but to admit we are wretched sinners in need of forgiveness, which only comes by faith in Christ. It is as we come face to face with the perfect Law of God, that the horror of sin is exposed and our desperate need of God's gift of salvation becomes clear." In Hebrews 10:16 God says, "*I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.*" The only way to overcome temptation is to have the law of God clearly in our mind, and then make the deliberate choice to dismiss all wrong thoughts and not to allow temptation to turn into sin.

2 Corinthians 10:5 reads,

"...bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

*O precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

For my pardon this I see:
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
For my cleansing this my plea:
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

*O precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

Nothing can for sin atone:
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
Naught of good that I have done:
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

*O precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

This is my hope and peace:
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
This is my righteousness:
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

*O precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

– Robert Lowry

Keep your hand in God’s hand, and keep your eyes focused upward.

Try Bible study on the internet:

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