

**The Heart of Discipleship**  
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We're in a series on discipleship called Forward in Faith. Today I'm preaching on The Heart of Discipleship.

I want to begin by defining the word "heart." The heart is just an organ pumping blood, right? NO - Much more than that. Just as your physical heart is the most important organ in your body, your spiritual heart is the most important part of your entire life.

As blood flows from our physical hearts, it sends life to every part of our body. Any part of the body that gets cut off from that life flow dies. Likewise the spiritual heart is the center of all physical, spiritual & moral life. It is the fountain of our conscience, thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, and purposes.

Think about this: What does it mean to have a big heart? Hard – Soft – Cold – Warm - Servant's heart – Giving – Shepherd's – It means we are motivated to act a certain way by something deep inside us.

The word heart has come to mean the middle, central or inmost part of anything. That's why your heart is the heart of discipleship. Discipleship is about receiving a new heart through faith in Jesus and then growing our heart of love for Him. That's why Proverbs 4:23 says:

*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*

NLT - *Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.*

The word guard in the original Hebrew literally means a prison guard or a military guard watching out for an enemy attack. We must guard our hearts because the enemy attacks our hearts! The heart is the center of our relationship with God. The heart is the center of our emotion. The heart is the center of our devotion. The heart determines our forward motion.

If the devil can control our hearts, he can control our lives. That's why we need to put on the breastplate of righteousness. That's why the heart is central to discipleship. It's not just about learning information – it's about heart transformation!

In Matthew 13:1-9 Jesus told a parable about various kinds of hearts.

*Jesus told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came*

*and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop — a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear."*

The disciples asked Jesus what this meant. Jesus said in verses 18-23

*"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.*

*The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."*

This parable shows us are the three keys to a fruitful harvest: The Sower, the Seed and the Soil. The sower is the person who sows the seed. The seed is the word of God. The soil is the heart of those who hear the word.

The sower and the seed was the same for each person in this parable. What was different was the soil. My job is to sow the seed every week. To preach the word of God. The seed is not my words, but God's Word. The seed is not my thoughts, but God's thoughts. The seed is not my truth, but God's truth. My words won't do much for you, but His word will set you free! He sends His word and heals you! His word is a lamp to your feet and a light to your path. His word gives wisdom and direction and comfort and strength.

My job is to sow the seed of God's Word. Your job is to prepare your soil to receive the seed of God's word. This parable shows us that ¾'s of the seeds do not grow. There's no problem with the seed – the problem is with the soil. The exact same seed can produce no crop, some crop or a huge crop.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus compares our hearts to various types of soil in which seed is sown. From this parable we learn that the condition of our hearts must be right for God's Word to produce a harvest in our lives.

Jesus talked about 4 types of soil – which represents 4 kinds of hearts.

- 1- The soil on the path represents a hard heart
- 2- The rocky soil represents a shallow heart

- 3- The thorny soil represents a cluttered heart
- 4- The good soil represents a good heart

Only a good heart can receive the Word of God. Now – I don't know about you – but I want to be good soil! I want a harvest of 30, 60 and a hundred-fold! So, how do we prepare our hearts to receive the seed of God's Word?

### **1- We must plow up the fallow ground of a hard heart**

Matthew 13:19 says:

*When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.*

A hard-hearted person cannot understand or grasp the truths of God's word. An enemy named Satan snatches every truth that was sown in a hard heart before it can even begin to grow and bear fruit.

I've witnessed to people before and literally watched their eyes glaze over as I shared truth with them. What was happening? The enemy was stealing the word by blinding their eyes to the knowledge of the truth.

The enemy wants to steal the Word from you too by keeping you from understanding the Bible or by keeping you from understanding the ways of God.

Here's how he does it – people believe God for something and if it does not work out the way they expected or when they expected – the enemy steps in with whispers of doubt about the goodness of God. These people are believing for an outcome rather than trusting God. This misunderstanding can cause them to harden their heart against God.

It sounds something like this: I went down to the altar for prayer for healing and I was not instantly healed. Other people were, but I still had to go through the pain of surgery. I just don't understand why God made me go through that.

OR

I got laid off at work and some ungodly people did not get laid off. I just don't understand why God let that happen.

OR

I believed God for a godly spouse and we got married and they ended up leaving me. I just don't understand why God did that to me.

Listen, we all face things we don't understand. We all go through tough times. But don't let Satan steal the Word!

I'm here to tell you that there will always be things in life that you don't understand. There will be ways of God you don't understand.

In Isaiah 55:8-9 God says:

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”*

Romans 11:33 says *His ways are past finding out!*

I believe we can grow in our understanding of God and His ways. But we will never get away from the need to walk by faith, not by sight. We will never be as wise as God. That’s why we must always trust Him and His Word. We must continue in the Word no matter what. We must know the Word and do the Word.

The amazing thing is that as we continue to do what is right – even when we don’t understand it – *then* our understanding will increase. Jesus said in John 7:17

*If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether My teaching comes from God or whether I speak on My own.*

In other words – obedience to God leads to greater understanding of His word and His ways. Some people never grow because they RATIONALIZE which leads to COMPROMISE which causes them to CRITICIZE the word of God and TRIVIALIZE the ways of God. And they don’t REALIZE that they JEAPORDIZE their eternal PRIZE!

Many Christians get so hard hearted that we don’t see the truth about ourselves in the Word. They see it for everybody else - but not for themselves.

If we are going to grow spiritually, we must constantly plow up the fallow ground of our hard hearts. Fallow ground is ground that has been left uncultivated. It’s been packed down from people walking on it and nothing can grow on it.

The ground of your heart might be fallow because you’ve not plowed it or planted seed. Or it might be because people have walked all over you. Whatever the reason, you must plow up the ground to prepare your soil. How do you do that? It’s probably now how you might think. Hosea 10:12 says

*Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you.*

Okay – but how do we break up that fallow ground? The answer is in verse 11 which says: *Judah shall plow.*

The name Judah means praise. One of the ways to break up the fallow ground of a hard heart is to put the plow of Judah to work by praising God.

You cannot praise the Lord with your heart and not be changed. You cannot

praise God and stay mad at God. You cannot praise God and blame God. Oh – you might be able to go through some motions and say some words, but when you really praise in spirit and in truth – that will break up your fallow ground. It might be hard at first. It might sound like this:

God I praise you – but LIFE IS HARD RIGHT NOW & I DON'T UNDERSTAND!  
But Lord I praise you. STILL don't understand, but I choose to praise you.  
Yes, it might be hard, but I'm gonna Praise You anyway!

If you keep going – Judah will plow! Praise will start breaking up your fallow ground and eventually it will sound like this.

God I praise you no matter what. You are good all the time. It doesn't matter what I'm going through, I'm gonna praise you anyway. It doesn't matter if I understand. Your word is true and your ways are right and You are good all the time.

Now your heart's plowed up to receive God's Word. So plant it.  
Lord, I praise you because Your plans are good not evil.  
I praise you because You work all things together for my good.  
I praise you because what the enemy means for harm, you work for my good.  
I praise you, I bless You, I worship you, I rejoice in you. Hallelujah!  
If you want to prepare your soil for the seed of God's word, plow up your fallow ground. Let praise prepare your heart for God's Word.

## **2- We must put down roots to overcome a shallow heart**

Matthew 13:20-21

*The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.*

The shallow-hearted person doesn't have any staying power. They are quick to believe, receive and rejoice, but they don't stay with it.

Satan steals from the hard hearted – but the enemy here is our own flesh. People operating in the flesh lack staying power when times get tough. They start a diet, but then quit it when they get hungry. They start exercising, but quit when they get sore. They start a budget, but quit when they want to buy something.

People do the same thing with the things of God. Some people are quick to follow Christ and join the church when they have a need we can meet. But then they start questioning things after a period of time. They get excited about the possibility of a better life, but they can't make it stick. They get enough help to get through their crisis and then they're gone. They just turn to God in the tough times when nothing else works.

Then there are those who only follow God when it's easy and everything is working. But as soon as the Christian life gets tough and they have to discipline themselves, they're gone.

Either way, the shallow-hearted listener will not remain faithful. When the going gets tough, they get going in the wrong direction. But if we are going to grow in faith, we must put down roots. How do we do that? Colossians 2:6-7 says:

*Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*

What does it mean to be rooted? It means to remain firmly and strongly in a particular place. Notice – when you are rooted – you are also built up. When your roots go down, your life grows up. When your roots spread out, your life starts to sprout. When your roots go deep, you grow and bear fruit.

We must be rooted in Christ to grow in Christ. But we also must be rooted in the local church – the house of the Lord. Psalm 92:13 says:

*Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.*

Being planted means I join a local church and I put down roots. I get involved, I give, I commit, I serve. If you're not planted, you won't flourish!

### **3- We must pull the weeds from a cluttered heart**

Matt. 13:22

*The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.*

Our three enemies are the devil, our flesh and the world. Too many Christians have cluttered up their lives with the things of this world. You might not think you are cluttered – but do you hear yourself say often, “I'm too busy. I don't have time for church or Bible reading or prayer.” Really, what you are saying is that the things of God are not a priority.

Some people are caught up in the world of entertainment which keeps them from being captured by the Lord. This includes TV, movies, sports, hobbies, video games, you name it. There's nothing wrong with those things... until...

You have time to go to a movie, but not to go to church.

You have time to read a book, but not the Bible.

You have time for Facebook, but never get your face in God's book!

If we are going to reap a harvest, we must pull out the weeds of every thing that distracts us from the things of God. We must seek first the Kingdom of God. That's our priority. Then...

#### **4- We must plant the seed of God's word in a good heart**

Matt. 13:23

*But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.*

Good soil represents the heart that has plowed up the fallow ground. It has put down roots. It has pulled out the weeds. And it is ready for the seed of God's word. Don't just prepare your soil, go ahead and plant the seed. That's what bears fruit. That's what keeps you growing in the things of God.

I want to encourage you to begin planting the word of God in your heart. The average Christian who says they believe every word of the Bible has never even read it! But I want us to be a congregation full of people who read the word, memorize the word, pray the word and obey the word. People who plant the seed in good ground and reap a harvest.

The average reader can read through the Bible in 1 year in 12 minutes a day. Start planting the seed of God's word in your life and watch what happens! Prepare your heart, plow up your fallow ground, put down roots, pull the weeds and watch yourself grow in the Lord! You will be like a tree planted by living water. You will stay green even in dry times. You will bring forth fruit and whatever you do will prosper!!

So which soil represents your heart? Whatever your heart is today, my message to you is: "Take this to heart." This is the heart of the matter – the heart of discipleship.

Jesus died to change your heart! What is your heart like?

If you have a cold heart, God can give you a warm heart.

If you have a heart of stone, God can give you a heart of flesh.

If you are chicken-hearted, God can make you a brave heart.

If you are broken hearted, God can heal your heart.

If you are hard hearted, God can soften your heart.

What kind of soil are you?

If your soil is shallow, put down roots!

If your soil is cluttered, pull out the weeds!

If your soil is fallow and packed down – Let Judah plow!

Begin to thank God for what He's done. Begin to praise God for who He is.

Let the praises of God plow up your fallow ground. If your heart is hard, you won't want to praise Him. But do it anyway. Let Judah plow!