

# “GOD WANTS TO TALK TO YOU” - Part 2

## Can You Hear Me Now?

Luke 8:4-15 July 18, 2010

The Bible tells us how God has interacted and communicated with humanity throughout history. Some think that conversation has stopped. No, it has not. And not only does God continue to speak, but God wants to speak to you and me. We have been given the equipment we need to hear from God, but we need to be tuned into God. The Parable of the Sower is about God, the Farmer, trying to plant the seed of the gospel into us. That message lands on all sorts of ears. Last week we talked about a closed mind and a hard heart. If our heart is hard, God has no chance of communicating with us. So it is important for us to cultivate an open mind. We talked about that last week. Now we are going to look at the other three soils, the other minds and hearts into which our Lord wants the good news to grow and mature. So if we cultivate an open mind, the next step is to

### **2. Allocate Time to Listen.**

That means we've got to slow down. We've got to make time to be quiet, to listen, that we might be able to hear God speak. It is not a matter of finding the time because it won't be found. For where the first barrier to hearing God is resistance, the second is hurry. So often I hear Alabama singing, "I'm in a hurry to get things done; Oh I rush and rush until life's no fun; All I really gotta do is live and die; But I'm in a hurry and don't know why." The problem is that when we keep hurrying through life, God gets shuffled to the sidelines. We say, "Ok God, I'm here now. If You want to speak to me I've got three minutes." God says, "I think I'll pass on this one." God wants more than our leftovers. More than our spare moments, for God wants to be the center of our life. The way we prove that Christ is the center of our life is to give Him our time. If we are important enough to be on God's schedule, shouldn't He be important enough to be on ours.

The hurried life is the second soil. Luke 8:6: *"Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. This seed began to grow but it soon withered and died for lack of moisture."* In Israel, much of the country is a thin layer of topsoil covering a bedrock of limestone. It's not very fertile, and yet by God's grace Israel's crops are sufficient to feed Europe. In America, we've got deep top soil in all sorts of different places. Not Israel. So you plant something on this rocky soil and the seed sprouts, but the roots can't grow, and so the plant withers and dies in no time at all.

In verse 13 Jesus tells us that *"The rocky soil represents those who hear the message with joy but like young plants in such soil their roots don't go very deep. They believe for a while but they wilt when the hot winds of testing blow."* Jesus says that this shallow soil represents a superficial mind. Sometimes we react superficially to God's word. We get excited. We react emotionally. We're moved impulsively. But we don't let God's word sink into the bedrock of our personality. So there's no real change. It's just a surface, emotional reaction with no depth.

Now over the years I have had people tell me how meaningful a service or a sermon has been. Yet I haven't seen a whole lot of people change their life or lifestyle. Why is that? Like Jesus tells us, the Word is received with joy, but it didn't have time to take root. Why not? Well the Air Force did a study and discovered that we forget 95% of everything we hear within 72 hours. Wives say that for husbands it is more like 72 minutes. Or 72 seconds. But 72 hours? As a pastor that is an incredibly depressing. I work to get and distribute these pearls of wisdom that might be able to change lives, all the time knowing that by Wednesday it's forgotten.

That's why we have the note pages. Because if we write something down, we remember it a little bit longer. So don't just toss these out. Put it on your refrigerator door or bathroom mirror. At the lunch table, pull out the note pages and ask one another, “What do you learn today? What do we need to work on? What difference is this going to make?” Review it so it's not just in one ear and out the other on the way to lunch.

Again, from verse 13, “*Like young plants in such soil their roots don't go very deep.*” Some say that this soil represents shallow, superficial people, and it might in some cases. More so, it represents a shallow, superficial faith. I think that's an important distinction because there have been times, and there still are times when our faith does not have the depth that one would want. For times come into our lives when it is hard to keep do what is right and what is righteous. But every church I know has had issues with fair-weather believers. They believe for a while but if a challenge comes, they're gone. It is a superficial commitment. When problems come, they leave.

How do we grow beyond superficiality? How can we develop spiritual roots and get spiritual depth in our life? Two very practical ways. One, schedule a daily time with God. It can be as little as 10 or 15 minutes but we have to put it on our daily schedule. Set aside some quiet time to read a little scripture and talk to God. And in that time, listen for God to speak to you through His Word, or through your heart. There is no better way to develop those spiritual roots than to spend time with God daily.

The second thing is to commit with a couple of other people on a weekly basis. Everybody needs that sort of growth and support group. It can be a Sunday School Class or Choir. It can be people from work who put aside a little personal time to pray, to get to know one another while getting to know God. And one reason why a group is helpful is because God can speak to us through other people, things that we may not be able to hear on our own. A small group is a great place to learn and grow as we interact with one another. And it heeds the advice of Hebrews 10:25, “*Don't give up the habit of meeting together. Instead let us encourage one another.*” We need to develop the habit of meeting together.

Some of you might be going through a tough time right now. There's a financial crisis or a health crisis or you're going through difficulties in a relationship. The temptation is to pull into a shell, to isolate yourself. But what is needed is a group that you can trust and rely on. A group for support and growth. A group that can help you hear from God, for God does want to talk to you. And God can and will bring you through whatever crisis is before you. But if we want to hear God's voice, we have to cultivate an open mind, and allocate the time to listen.

### **3. Eliminate the Distractions.**

We can't hear God when our mind is crowded with other thoughts; with worries, concerns, and anxieties. When the mind is filled with our to do list, with “What's next? What do I still have to do?”, then we can't hear God. The mind is already filled to overflowing. It might be dreams or thoughts of doom, ambitions or activities. If the mind is filled with television, radio, Internet, palm pilot, cell phone, there is too much noise to be able to hear from God.

This is the third soil that Jesus calls weeds. Luke 8:7: “*Other seed fell in the weeds and the weeds grew with it and strangled it.*” Notice that the seed did take root. It started to sprout. But before it can bear fruit, the weeds choke the life out of the plant. This is clearly explained in verse 14: “*The seed that fell among the*

*weeds stands for those who hear but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries and riches and pleasures and they don't mature.”*

Notice the phrase “*as they go.*” Are you always on the go? If so, this could be you, or me. Where the first barrier to hearing God is resistance, and the second hurry, the third barrier is busyness. We can get so distracted and so busy that we don't have time to hear God. An old maxim says, “Beware of the barrenness of a busy life.” Too often we confuse activity with productivity. They are not the same. If we just keep running around in circles, we never get anywhere. There is no progress, and no fruit is being produced. So many are stressed out, choked out because they are at the end of their rope. They're about to throw in the towel because they are so active but not productive.

What are the weeds growing in our lives that choke out the ability to hear God? There are three very common ones. First is worry. We get so busy with the problems and pressures of daily living that we forget God. I have read that “worry” really means “pulled in different directions.” Stretched to the limit and pulled in different directions. I forget God because I'm too filled with anxiety. I'm too filled with worry that I don't even think about God any more.

Second is riches. We can be so busy making money that we forget God. There's always more work to do. At times I've felt like the guy who was in the Dunkin' Donuts commercials. “Gotta make the donuts. Gotta make the donuts. Gotta make the donuts.” Don't know if I'm going or coming. All I know is that I gotta make the donuts. And God gets lost in the commute. We get so busy making a living that we forget to make a life. And we can't hear God.

First worry. Second is riches. Third is pleasure. Pleasure? What's wrong with pleasure? Nothing. God created it. God gave us five senses which give us the ability to experience pleasure. He created all the pleasures in the world. So there's nothing wrong with pleasure except when we're so busy pursuing fun that we forget God. Then that joyous pleasure becomes just another weed.

Worry, riches, and pleasure are three weeds, but there are bunches of others. In fact, anything that we allow to overshadow God in our life is a weed. A weed is anything that chokes God out of our schedule, out of our life. It could be a very good thing. But if we allow it to choke God out of our life, something that prevents us from hearing God, it's a weed.

Now think about this. How much effort does it take to grow weeds? None. Weeds are a sign of neglect. It takes no effort at all. We put down mulch to try to keep weeds from growing, but still they pop through all over the place. Weeds just happen, but when they happen, they take away the nourishment from what we want to grow. Spiritually, whenever we neglect that quiet time with God, whenever we neglect meeting with others who support and nurture us, weeds are going to pop up in our life. They may not be the three I lifted up, but some weed will be there, and it will take away and steal our opportunities to hear God.

This soil represents a preoccupied mind. A busy mind. Sometimes my computer slows down incredibly and I complain, but often it's my fault because I am asking it to do too many things. Too many things clutter the ability to communicate. And our minds and hearts work that way as well. In the Old Testament there was a

time when the prophet Elijah desperately wanted to hear from God. He was tired, fearful, and depressed, hiding in a cave. There was a mighty wind making all sorts of noise. Then an earthquake rattled the whole mountain around him. Finally a fire ripped down the mountainside. But God wasn't in those things. No. Then the Lord spoke to Elijah in a quiet, still voice. God whispered to Elijah.

The problem with a whisper is that we have to be quiet in order to hear it. Noise blocks it from our ears. And here's the thing, God is whispering to us all the time, but we don't hear because we're not quiet. And often we don't want to be quiet. If we were to sit here in total silence for five minutes some of you would freak out. The quiet seems to last forever and we can't take it. And yet it is in quietness that God says, “Hey! I'm talking to you.” All week God whispers to us. He doesn't shout. He doesn't write it in the sky. He whispers. And have to be quiet to hear.

To hear God, we must Cultivate an Open Mind, Allocate the Time to Listen, and Eliminate the Distractions. And then

#### **4. Cooperate with What He Says.**

This is very, very important. God speaks to those who decide in advance to do whatever God tells them. Those who say, “Here I am Lord. The answer is yes. What's the question?” But too often we say, “God, tell me what You want and I'll decide if it's a good idea or not. I'll look at my other options and will let you know later what I think is best.” No. God's not going to waste His time on that. We choose God's way even before we know what God's way is.

That's the good soil. Verse 15 *“The seed that fell in the good soil stands for those who hear the message and retain it in a good and obedient heart and they persist until they bear fruit.”* Notice marks of good soil: They hear it. They retain it. They hold on to it. They remember it. Then they obey it, and persist in it until they bear fruit. And fruit will in turn, bear fruit. In the Living Bible it says, *“They listen to God's words and cling to them and steadily spread them to others who also soon believed.”* God expects us to pass on everything we learn, that we might sow the seed of good news wherever we go, so others can hear, retain, obey, and persist until they bear fruit. The good soil is a willing mind. “Lord God, here I am. They answer is yes. Now what's the question?”

If you put yourself in this parable, where are you? The barren soil of a closed mind and hard heart, resisting God's call on your life? The superficial shallow soil that hears the word but is in such a hurry to go to what's next that the seed of God's Word never has the chance to grow deep roots? The preoccupied soil that is overgrown with weeds of bills and budgets, events and activities; so busy working on good projects that you never can hear from the good Lord? Or are you a productive soil that hears, retains, obeys, and persists until you bear fruit, both in your life and in the lives of those around you. You can be, we can be that good soil if we have our ears on, if we find ways to hear from God. And it can happen. God wants it to happen. And in your life, may it be so. Amen.