



SESSION TWO

FROM DOUBT TO FAITH

**DOUBT ISN'T SOMETHING
TO FEAR OR SUPPRESS
BUT TO CONFRONT HEAD
ON WITH COURAGE,
INTEGRITY, AND THE
SUPPORT OF COMMUNITY.**

BECOMING GOOD SOIL

READ MARK 4:1-20.

As we seek to combat doubt in our lives, it's helpful to examine our own faith. In the parable you just read, the farmer spreads seed with a variety of results. The problem is not the seed. The seed represents God's Word, which is perfect and has the power to transform the life of anyone who will humbly receive it. The variable is the soil. The soil represents the heart of each individual who hears the Word of God. Let's take a look at each "soil" and see how we can make sure we are "good soil."

The first soil is the hardened path. This person's heart is so hard that he or she doesn't even take time to consider God's Word. This hardening comes from influences such as sin, false teaching, and indifference. Satan's aggressive tactics to snatch up the seed are instantly effective in this person's life.

The next person is "rocky ground"—his or her faith is a mile wide but an inch deep. This person shows impressive passion for God and appears to be growing, but due to shallow roots, he or she falls away at the first sign of persecution or hardship. Following Jesus is more than momentary hype or having goosebumps in worship. You must intentionally develop deep roots in Christ (see Col. 2:6-7). We can learn much from our persecuted brothers and sisters in this area. One persecuted Christian told Nik Ripken, author of *The Insanity of God*, to send a message to the American church: "Don't ever give up in freedom what we would never have given up in persecution!"¹ May we never get bored with essential things like daily Bible reading, prayer, and fellowship, for which persecuted Christians willingly risk their lives every day.

Due to their subtlety, the "thorns" may be the most common hindrance. Inevitably, a distracted faith will lead to doubt. What "other things" are fighting for the attention that the Word of God should be taking up in your life? Only time will tell if your heart is truly set on knowing Christ or if you are more concerned with worldly things.

The "good soil" person hears the Word and gladly welcomes it. This implies that he or she fully embraces it, diligently seeks to understand it, and orders his or her entire

life around it. In a parallel account in Luke 8:15, this person is said to, "having heard the word with an honest and good heart, hold on to it and by enduring, produce fruit." The fruit from this type of life is exponential! If you become the kind of person who diligently seeks to hear, understand, and obey God's Word, you will be amazed at all God will do in and through you.

REFLECT / APPLY

What worldly influences might the enemy be using to harden your heart to God's Word right now? How can you soften your heart to allow the seed of Scripture to take deeper root in your life?

Does your faith feel shallow or easily shaken by difficulties? What practical habits—such as daily Bible reading, prayer, fellowship or other spiritual disciplines—do you need to focus on most right now to deepen your faith?

In what way's do you need to reorder your daily priorities to prevent "other things" from choking out your spiritual growth?

How would consistently hearing, understanding, and obeying God's Word help you overcome doubt in your life?

Take time to pray, asking God to protect you from the various distractions from obeying His Word. Confess anything that has hindered your devotion to His Word, and ask that He will help you become good soil.

PERSONAL STUDY DAY 2

THE NARROW GATE

READ MATTHEW 7:13-29.

You probably have someone close to you who has walked away from the faith after a tragedy or a series of disappointments. These are some of the most common triggers that can cause people to start doubting their faith. One theory I have as to why this is so common is that many people believe what I call the “prosperity gospel lite.” Most people rightly reject versions of the prosperity gospel, which twist Scripture to say that if you are generous and have enough faith, God will bless you with health and wealth. However, the “Coke Zero” version of this false doctrine is alive and well. The National Study of Youth and Religion did a survey on the beliefs of American teenagers where they defined the most common system of faith as “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.” This vague system of thought was held by many young people who identify as Christian. The researchers summarize it with these basic doctrines: “1. A God exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth. 2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. 3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about one’s self. 4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when He is needed to resolve a problem. 5. Good people go to heaven when they die.”²

Matthew 7:13-29 reveals where these beliefs fall short. There is only one “narrow gate” to salvation: knowing and trusting Christ alone. Most people miss this narrow way and travel down the easy broad path of destruction. There will be many who think they are good with “the big man upstairs” but don’t have a genuine saving relationship with Jesus. Please don’t let this be true of you. Matthew 7:22-23 may be the most terrifying statement in the whole Bible. It’s possible to attend church your whole life, and even have powerful religious experiences, but if you’re still trusting in anything other than Jesus for salvation, none of those things will ever be enough. Only Jesus can save you. While we are not saved by good works, a life of obedience will be evident in all true followers of Christ.

In verses 24-27, we see that a life of knowing Jesus will be built on obedience to His teaching. Those who base their lives on His words will be like a house built on a solid

foundation, whereas those who ignore His teaching will be like a house built on sand. The winds and storms of life will come to both types of people, but only one will endure. A strong faith that weathers the storms of doubt must be built upon a true relationship with Jesus, which leads to careful obedience to His commands.

REFLECT / APPLY

Are you sure of your salvation? Are you trusting in Christ alone? Have you genuinely repented of sin and put all your trust in Him to save you? How do you know?

In what ways have you seen Moralistic Therapeutic Deism creep into your own thinking?

Why do you think so few people enter the narrow gate and follow Jesus on the difficult road to life?

What specific teachings of Jesus do you need to apply more intentionally to strengthen the foundation of your faith?

Take time to pray, surrendering to Christ in a fresh way and thanking Him for your salvation. Ask Him to help you follow Him fully and to build your life on Him alone.

PERSONAL STUDY DAY 3

ROOTED IN THE WORD

READ PSALM 1.

There are two paths before you: one that is rooted in God's Word and promises spiritual blessing, and another that is temporary and tragic. The key distinction is a commitment to God's Word. When your mind is immersed in and captivated by Scripture, obedience, joy, and faith will overflow. Reading the Bible out of discipline is better than nothing, but delighting in God's Word and meditating on it continually is life changing. When you delight in something, you eagerly return to it, always craving more.

The most effective way to cultivate a deep appreciation for God's Word is to practice Scripture memorization and biblical meditation. However, it's crucial to understand that biblical meditation is fundamentally different from New Age meditation. New Age meditation often focuses on looking inward to find peace or emptying the mind to connect with an ambiguous universal energy. In contrast, biblical meditation is God-centered, not self-centered. It's not about emptying your mind but about filling it with God's truth and prayerfully reflecting on how it applies to your life. This is an active, prayerful process of contemplating the implications of a specific passage, not a passive spiritual exercise. Thomas Manton described it as "dwelling upon the truths of God to work them into the heart."³ In his classic work, *Knowing God*, theologian J. I. Packer explains: "Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God."⁴

The most effective way to incorporate biblical meditation into your life is to practice the discipline of Scripture memorization. If I could revisit my twenties and offer myself advice, I would commit to a stricter regimen of Scripture memorization and being intentional about reviewing old verses every day. Over the past twenty years, God has used the hundreds of verses I've memorized more powerfully than any other spiritual discipline, perhaps even surpassing my quiet time of Bible reading and prayer. These verses have served as a warning to overcome temptation, a corrective and renewing

force in the gospel when I fall into sin, a source of encouragement in times of hardship, and a deep well of wisdom for ministry.

Imagine how your life would be different if you memorized one thousand Bible verses perfectly. This goal is more achievable than you might think! By memorizing one new verse each week and following a simple system to review previously learned verses (spending about fifteen minutes per day), you could have one thousand verses committed to memory by the time you're my age. If you dedicate just fifteen minutes a day to memorizing and meditating on Scripture, I promise it will transform your life.

REFLECT / APPLY

What insights or themes stand out to you from Psalm 1 and today's study?

How have you experienced biblical meditation in your life? What steps could you take to integrate it more fully into your daily routine?

Are you interested in taking up the one thousand verse challenge? Who is a friend you can invite to join you in this journey?

Take a moment to pray, thanking God for the gift of His Word and asking for His guidance to help you delight in Scripture. Ask Him if He would like you to adopt any new habits in Scripture memory or meditation. Pro tip: Check out the app called Bible Memory Pro and the Topical Memory System by The Navigators to get started.