

## **April 28 – Leader’s Guide - Luke 8: 4-15 “How’s Your Heart?”**

Coming out of the Easter season, we recognize that in the resurrection God’s future has come into the present. One of the implications of that is that those who are in Christ are invited to live in anticipation of that coming kingdom. This leaves us with a central question. How? How are we shaped to reflect its reality? The parable answers...

### **Read Luke 8:4-15**

A parable had a very clear framework for interpretation. They revealed something about God, the nature of the kingdom, and with one central point drove listeners to a decision. We will follow this pattern for our discussion.

1. What do we learn about God?

*There is a shocking strangeness to the sower sowing seed where it has no possibility to grow. This is reflecting the reality that God is so desirous for the kingdom to grow in us, so desirous for us to reflect his goodness, kindness, love, grace and mercy that he pours out all of himself, all of his resources into us. The Lord is a reckless, lavish, generous giver.*

2. What do we learn about the nature of the kingdom? (Note: It will help here to clarify together what Jesus means by ‘the word’, and ‘the heart’)

*We learn this about the kingdom: it takes hold of us, grows in us when the seed of his word takes root in our hearts.*

*The word is yes scripture, but more than that the incarnate word Jesus, and more than that the gospel, the historical reality and glorious implications of his death and resurrection. But the word is not just information, not just a set of beliefs there is a creative element to it. We all know the creative power of words. Destructive words spoken over us diminish us, good words build us up. In Jesus we have words spoken over us that seek to form in us the way and pattern of the kingdom.*

*We often think of the heart as the seed of our emotions. Biblically however the heart is the center of our being, a combination of our thinking, our doing, our feeling.*

*The seed of his word, his creative word must take root in our hearts.*

*That is the main point of the parable.*

In the parable Jesus uses a common rabbinic teaching tool showing three ways the soil doesn't receive the seed, reflecting three ways the heart doesn't receive the word, so that we might more clearly see the way that it does. Let's now reflect on each heart condition in turn.

3. The hard heart is often born of closing the door on the word before the word can speak. What are some of the ways we close the door on the word before the word can speak?

*There are some secular ways that we might do this:*

*"The bible is only myth, utilized to affirm traditional power structures, no time for this"*

*"The Bible is born of a pre-scientific age. We've moved beyond the Bible"*

*But there are also religious ways that we do this.*

*We put our assurance on our belief. I know I'm saved, know God loves me, know I'm on the right path because I believe the right things. This fosters self-righteousness, spiritual pride, an unteachable spirit. As a result the Bible can't challenge our "Christian Convictions"*

*An overly intellectual faith can also foster a hard heart. The gospel becomes an idea, a theory, a concept. We can talk about it, reflect on it, but it doesn't challenge us personally. It isn't given the space to thrill us, move us, shape us we keep it outside of us.*

4. The shallow heart roots itself in emotion, our feelings in response to changing circumstances. What is the result of such a heart condition?

*Our emotions, our changing circumstances become the determining factor in discerning truth.*

*By this image Jesus seems to be suggesting that if the word truly takes root in our hearts we can weather anything, but if our faith is rooted in emotion suffering will dry us right up.*

5. The seed in the thorns reflects the divided heart. We have given our hearts to Jesus *and* other things. What are some of the things we give our hearts to other than Jesus? What are the results?

*These are usually good things that we make into ultimate things. They could be anything – career, money, pleasure, comfort, family, beauty, romance etc.*

*There may be wisdom in using the tests from the Tim Keller sermon that Tim mentioned in order to discern together what good things we have made into ultimate things...*

*The test of anger. If someone or something gets in the way of something good we are pursuing we will be angry. If they get in the way of something ultimate there will be inordinate rage.*

*The test of fear. If a good thing in life is being threatened there will rightly be worry, but if an ultimate thing is threatened, we will be paralyzed by fear.*

*The test of grief. If we lose a good thing in life it will take time to grieve it, if we lose an ultimate thing, we may very well consider ending it all.*

*The test of criticism. If we are criticized for a good thing in life it will take time to process the hurt, if we are criticized for an ultimate thing those words will likely linger a lifetime.*

*The word will grow in a divided heart but nowhere near its full potential.*

6. The Lord is a generous sower, and the word contains everything necessary for kingdom growth, the only invitation to us is to hear and hold fast. What is it to hear and hold fast?

*There are some curious verses between the parable and its explanation. These verses reflect the reality that we haven't really heard until we respond as if we have heard. Indeed, the Hebrew verb for hearing catches up the effects of hearing.*

*In his book *Spiritual Depression: Its causes and cure* D.M. Lloyd Jones reflects on the nature of our hearts, that combination of intellect, will and emotion. For the word to take root in our hearts it must transform our thinking, direct our will, and catch up our emotions.*

*It invites the posture of sitting with the word and asking: What am I being invited to believe? If I truly believe, how then will I act? If this is true, how will I feel?*

*That is what it is to hear and hold fast.*

7. What heart condition do you most resonate with presently? How would you like your group to pray for you in that? Spend time now praying for one another.

*As the leader be prepared to start the conversation off. Your vulnerability and openness will set the tone. This is not the time to offer advice but to come around one another in prayer and encouragement.*