

# HARD HEART

Small Group Study Guide | April 14, 2024

GRACE  
FELLOWSHIP

**Discuss:** What are some causes and results of hard-heartedness toward God?

**Key Text:** *“And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it...13 And he said to them, ‘Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows the word. 15 And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.’”* (Mark 4:4, 13-15)

In our final four lessons beginning today, we’ll consider the four types of soil—or conditions of the heart—Jesus describes in the parable:

- The Hard Heart (Mk.4:13-15)
- The Shallow Heart (Mk.4:5-6, 16-17)
- The Cluttered Heart (Mk.4:7, 18-19)
- The Receptive Heart (Mk.4:8-9, 20).

Jesus used soil to symbolize the human heart. Just as good soil will take full hold of a seed and produce a harvest, a heart that is open and receptive to God’s Word will take full hold of the message and a harvest of spiritual fruit will result. However, a heart that is not receptive toward God’s Word will not take in the seed and will bear no harvest (in the parable, Jesus describes three different kinds of unreceptive, unfruitful hearts). Note that the issue here is not the quality of the seed nor the quality of how the seed is sown (both are sufficient); rather, the focus is upon the condition of the soil—the heart’s response to the seed of God’s Word. This is why Jesus said this parable is the most important parable of them all (Mk.4:13): If a person does not first recognize from the parable that his heart is unreceptive to God’s Word and why, then no truth Jesus could further teach would matter since they won’t receive it. But if a person has a heart that is receptive to God’s Word, he can experience God’s supernatural harvest in his life.

Gardens or fields in Israel were marked off by footpaths. A sower would take a handful of seeds and fling them into the field. While the sower aimed for the fertile soil, some seed would inevitably fall on soil where it would not take root such as the hard footpath, or shallow, rocky ground, or patches of ground with weeds. In today’s text, we’ll study the first type of heart represented by the footpaths that separated the fields: the hard heart.

## 1. In a hard heart, the seed sits on the surface, but never enters the soil.

The hard ground represents a person who hears God’s Word but has no interest in it or is hard-hearted toward it. The seed sits on the surface and never enters the soil. So, Satan, like a bird, immediately plucks the message away (Mat.13:4), preventing the Word from taking root.

**Discuss:** According to Mark 16:14 and Hebrews 3:12-15, what words are associated with hard-heartedness?

## 2. A hard heart prevents God's Word from having effect in one's life.

The Word of God has supernatural power to transform us, but only if we receive it humbly and obediently. Jesus taught that the potential work of God's Word can be voided in a person's life when they replace it with human tradition. When speaking to the hard-hearted Pharisees, Jesus said, "You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men...13 thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down" (Mk.7:8,13). The Pharisees had constructed a body of religious tradition that they considered to be authoritative over Scripture, thus making the potential work God's Word void in their lives.

The Bible also teaches that when a hard-hearted person self-servingly strains an interpretation of Scripture to mean whatever they prefer it to mean, as opposed to its plain meaning, they make God's word void in their lives and bring about their own destruction. Peter describes "ignorant and unstable" people who "twist" the Scripture "to their own destruction" (2 Pet.3:16).

**Discuss:** How have you seen human traditions replace the authority of the Bible, thus making Scripture of no effect in the lives of people caught up in the traditions?

**Discuss:** In what ways have you seen self-serving misinterpretations of Scriptures make the Bible of no effect in the lives of those believing the misinterpretations?

## 3. A heart that is hard toward God and His Word is deceitful and destructive.

Throughout Scripture, the "heart" refers to the inward motivations that drive a person's thoughts, words, and actions. Jeremiah warns us of the unregenerated heart: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer.17:9). When our hearts are hard toward God, like the hard-as-concrete-pathway in the parable, we are easily deceived and are destined for destruction.

**Discuss:** Why is "just follow your heart" unwise, dangerous advice to give someone?

## 4. God gives us a new heart through Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

God promised to provide a new heart for us in Christ: "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ez.36:26). 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Romans 5:5 says, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

**Discuss:** In what ways has your heart—the inward motivations that drive your thoughts, words, and actions—changed since you received Christ?

### For Further Study:

Free online study tools (commentaries, dictionaries, etc.) at [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org)

*How to Listen to God* by Charles Stanley

"What Does the Bible Mean by a 'New Heart'?" article at [gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org)