

SHALLOW HEART

Small Group Study Guide | April 21, 2024

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discuss: Why do you think some people seem to start to follow Christ but then give up?

Key Text: *“Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away....16 And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. 17 And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.” (Mark 4:5-6, 16-17)*

We are learning in our “Grow (Up)” series on Jesus’ Parable of the Sower that the four types of soil mentioned in the parable represent four types of hearers of God’s Word. In today’s lesson, we’ll consider the shallow heart (Mk.4:16-17), which is represented by areas of the field where the soil was thin with a thick layer of rock underneath. At first, the seed seems to take root—the shoot springs up quickly—but since there is no root system and thus no water to nourish it, when the sun comes up the shoot is scorched and dies. The shallow soil symbolizes the person who hears God’s Word and seems to receive it at first but does not truly take it into their life. When tough times and persecution come (Mk.4:17), represented by the sun (Mt.13:5-6), the seed is burned and dies.

1. The shallow-hearted hearer did not have salvation and then lose it; rather, he never truly received salvation in the first place.

Jesus is not teaching that the shallow-hearted hearer received salvation and then lost it; rather, He is saying that the shallow-hearted hearer never truly received salvation to begin with—God’s Word never took root and thus was never given opportunity to do its life-regenerating work. When the Gospel takes root in a person’s life, God performs several irreversible, securing actions in the believer’s life. The believer:

- Becomes a new creation which can never be destroyed (2 Cor.5:17),
- Experiences redemption which can never be revoked (Titus 2:14),
- Experiences justification which can never be reversed (Rom.5:1),
- Is sealed with the Holy Spirit which can never be broken (Eph.1:13),
- Is promised eternal life which can never be rescinded (Jn.10:28-29),
- Is given salvation as a gift which can never be withdrawn (Rom.6:23),
- Is guaranteed glorification which can never be cancelled (Rom.8:30).

The shallow-hearted hearer who falls away (Mk.4:17) is an example of the person John describes in 1 John 2:19: *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”*

Discuss: How do these verses highlight the eternal security of a person who truly receives and believes God’s Word: John 3:16, 18; Romans 8:1, 38-39; Jude 1:24-25?

2. The true believer is rooted, built up, and established in Christ.

Not only does the Bible describe a true believer as a person who receives God's Word and allows it to take root in their life, but it also describes the true believer as being rooted, built up, and established in Christ: "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith..." (Col.2:6-7). Let's take a closer look at these helpful phrases that come from the worlds of agriculture, architecture, and law:

- **Agricultural Analogy: In Christ, we are like a tree permanently rooted:**
"rooted...in him" (Col.2:7a). The word "rooted" speaks of being firmly fixed and permanently grounded in Christ. Note that it indicates a past action that has continuing effect, meaning that we have been rooted and will always continue to be rooted in Christ since nothing can separate us from Him!

Discuss: How does Jesus describe our rootedness in Him in John 15:1-11?

- **Architectural Analogy: In Christ, we are like a building continually rising:**
"...built up in him" (Col.2:7b). Because we are permanently rooted in Christ, we are now able to be built up in Christ like a building continuously rising. The phrase "built up" indicates that it is currently and continually being built up. As we cooperate with the Lord's work in us, we grow and rise toward maturity.

Discuss: How does Peter describe our being built in Christ in 1 Peter 2:4-5?

- **Law Analogy: In Christ, we are like a law that has been forever ratified:**
"...established in the faith" (2:7c). The word "established" was used when a law was firmly decided upon and approved. Not only are we like a tree rooted firmly and permanently in Christ, and a building rising continuously, but we are also approved by God—it has been decided and authorized by Him that we are saved and eternally established. Note that the emphasis in all three-word pictures in v.7 is on what God does in and for us, not on anything we've done for God.

Discuss: What does Philippians 1:6 teach about God's work in us?

3. A faith that can't be tested can't be trusted.

Note that it was the "heat" of tribulation and persecution that caused the shallow-hearted person to fall away (4:17). Rather than fearing these tests of our faith, James 1:2-4 tells us to rejoice in them because they reveal the genuineness of our faith and give our faith a chance to grow: "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." God will use our trials not to destroy our faith, but to develop our faith when our heart's soil is open and receptive to Him and His Word.

Discuss: When has your faith grown because of a tough time you went through?

For Further Study:

Free online study tools (commentaries, dictionaries, etc.) at blueletterbible.org

What's Good about Feeling Bad? by John Thomas and Gary Habermas

"Why Does God Allow Us to Go through Trials?" article at gotquestions.org