

GOOD GROUND – PART I

Peter Hay, prepared for Sunday Bible study, 9 August 2020
Transcription of recording, slightly edited

Introduction

Our focus today is on the good ground.

As we did with the subject of thorny ground, we will allow two sessions to consider this content and its implications for our lives.

As I was reflecting on the content in preparation for today's session, I realised that we've spoken a fair bit about good ground in our coverage of the other grounds, as these each address the way of life as a Christian which is other than from a heart of good ground.

In talking about what it means to *turn from* having a heart based on these different grounds, it is obvious that we are *turning to* a culture and an expression reflected in what the Scripture terms 'good ground'.

References to good ground

We will begin today's session by reading Jesus' explanation of this ground, as recorded in the Gospels.

Jesus said, 'But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundred-fold, some sixty, and some thirty.' Mat 13:23.

Jesus made a similar statement in the Gospel of Mark.

'But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirty-fold, some sixty, and some a hundred.' Mar 4:20.

The final reference states, 'But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a *noble* and *good heart*, keep it and bear fruit with patience.' Luke 8:15

A noble and good heart

The word 'noble' literally means 'good' and, in fact, it is the very same Greek word for 'good ground'.

This is interesting. One could read this passage as, 'But the ones that fell on good ground are those who having heard the word with a "good" and "good heart", keep it and bear fruit with patience.'

The second 'good' is the same Greek word that Jesus used when He responded to the fellow who called Him 'Good Teacher'. He said, 'Why do you call Me good? No-one is good except God alone.' Mar 10:18.

So, the first is 'noble', which means 'good'. And the second 'good' - 'good heart' - means the good that is *of God*.

The nature of good ground

This is important, because we are going to talk about the nature of good ground.

I will make some initial and broad observations, and then will develop these understandings and points across the course of the next two sessions.

Fruit unto eternal life

My first point is that good ground is the *only* ground upon which the seed brings forth *fruit unto eternal life*.

In other words, a person cannot enter heaven unless they are coming from a heart of good ground. This is the only context for eternal life.

It is most important that we recognise that bearing fruit is eternal life.

It is not sufficient for a person to try to get through from any other perspective. If we don't bring forth fruit, then we are not able obtain eternal life.

Hearing, accepting, understanding the word

The second point is that a person bears fruit because they hear, and accept, the word.

The actual word that Mark used in terms of 'accept', literally means 'to receive into the heart as a treasure'. This thought relates perfectly to our discussion in the last session on thorny ground.

A person bears fruit *because* they hear the word, accept the word and understand the word.

Understanding is not merely our mental comprehension of the word. Rather, it is that the word we've heard has become *the way in which we walk and live*.

Different returns of fruit – the parable of the mina

The third point is that, with a heart of good ground, we can bear different volumes of fruit; some thirty, some sixty and some a hundredfold.

This immediately reminds us of the parable of the mina in Luke 19:12-27.

We remember that everyone received one mina. From that one mina, one person multiplied ten other minas, while another multiplied five other minas. Of course, we are aware that there was an unfaithful servant who didn't multiply anything with his mina.

Jesus then identified both the servants who multiplied ten minas and five minas as 'good' and said that they had been 'faithful in a little'.

This is exciting, isn't it? We see the mina as being 'a little', which is like a little seed.

We also see the word for 'good servant' as being the same 'good' - the same Greek word - that is used for 'good ground,' as in the good heart representing the good ground.

Our increase comes from God

These good and faithful servants, each received *authority*. We will now talk about authority, because authority associates with our *naming*, in Christ.

They received authority over a number of cities which corresponded to the number of minas they multiplied.

The point that I want to focus on in this account is what they actually confessed to the Lord when they brought the proceeds of this mina.

The good servants who had been faithful in a little and had multiplied the mina testified, saying, 'Master, *Your* mina has earned ten minas.'

What they didn't say was, 'Master, *I* earned ten minas from the mina that You gave to me.'

Do you see the big difference between these two responses?

The servants recognised that it was *what they had received* that multiplied because of their *diligence*. It was not their *own* capacity or skill that resulted in the multiplication.

The key point is that the increase came from God Himself.

This is fundamental to our understanding the nature of good ground, and the principle of firstfruits, which we will introduce today.

It is notable in Jesus' saying that the good ground person, or the good ground heart, heard the word with a noble and good heart.

Misunderstandings of the parable of the sower

Many people in the past have considered this to mean that some people must be naturally good-hearted.

Their view has been that there are some people who are wayside in nature, while others tend to be stony, and a third group present as being thorny. Lastly, if some are very fortunate, they are 'good-ground' persons according to nature, and are the ones pre-destined for salvation.

This thinking, however, reveals a significant misunderstanding of what it means to have a good heart.

The deceitfulness of the natural heart

No-one, naturally, has a noble and good heart, and the Scriptures overtly bear this out.

'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?' Jer 17:9.

Jeremiah proclaimed the word of the Lord, who was saying, 'There is not one good heart among you all. It is, instead, desperately wicked.'

This all seems a bit odd. If good ground is needed to be able to bring forth fruit, there will obviously be no fruit coming forth, because no-one is seen to have a good heart.

We then find that there is another passage which, even more deliberately, addresses the issue of the goodness or otherwise of our heart.

Paul spoke to the Romans, and he was quoting from the Old Testament.

'What then? Are we better than they?'

He was obviously talking about the distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles. His point was that, if we think we naturally have a good heart, we are presuming that we are naturally better than those people who have wayside, stony or thorny hearts.

'What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and

Greeks that they are all under sin [not one good heart among them]. As it is written: there is none righteous, no, not one.' Rom 3:9-10.

This is an amazing statement in relation to the Jews, because they had the covenants; they had the word; and the promises belonged to them naturally. Even still, not one among them all was righteous.

'There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.' Rom 3: 11-12.

A noble and good heart – born of God

This is quite incredible. We are supposed to have a good heart so that we can bring forth fruit. However, we find that not one person on the entire earth has a good heart.

How then, do we understand this element of the parable?

The answer is that a noble and good heart does not naturally belong to a person.

A noble and good heart belongs to a person *who has been born of God*.

Their heart is good because it has been made new through regeneration, through new birth and baptism into Christ.

We can have a good heart, but not because we have one naturally.

A new heart comes from Christ

The truth is that we receive a new heart *from Christ*. He gives us everything that pertains to life and godliness, so that we might become partakers of the divine nature. 2Pe 1:3.

We will look at a passage that demonstrates the principle that we don't begin with a good heart, but we receive one so that we can bring forth good fruit.

'For I [the Lord] will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land.' Eze 36:24.

The inheritance that belongs to the firstborn

Where we see, in the prophetic Scriptures, the Lord calling the people to return to the land refers to 'the land of promise'.

This is the inheritance that belongs to 'the firstborn'. The firstborn is a company of people; they are the covenant children of God.

When He said, 'I will take you from among all the nations, and gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land,' He meant, 'I will give you an inheritance that belongs to a son.' He was referring to sonship here.

The application of water and blood

'Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.' Eze 36:25.

'Clean water' is, actually, the water that flowed from Christ's side. The apostle John said that it wasn't water alone; it was water and blood together.

These elements are the water of the word. It is the application of blood and water, ministered by the Spirit, that is delivering us from the uncleanness of our idolatry.

Idolatry refers to the worship of anything other than a fellowship or a worship of the Lord Himself *in Spirit and truth*.

This is a *sprinkling* of 'clean' water upon us. The sprinkling element of blood, and the water element of the word, deliver us from the uncleanness of idolatry, so that we can participate as a company of priests.

This particular verse refers to the issue of wayside ground.

By the application of the water and the blood, the seed of the word is enabled to germinate within us as we hear the word that is being proclaimed to us, and this is cleansing us from all of our idolatry.

Remember that we fall into idolatry when we are without understanding.

I will give you a new heart

'I will give you a new heart [not naturally; you now have a good heart] and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.' Eze 36:26.

This speaks of the process of being *born of water* to enter the kingdom.

'A heart of flesh does' not mean that we continue to live by the principle of the flesh. The term

literally means 'a heart that can be joined to the body'.

The process of being born of water through baptism

That was the issue of stony ground as well. With stony ground, we *stumble*. This stumbling refers to a *relational* stumbling, which means that we fall away from fellowship.

With regard to the hardness, or the stoniness, of our heart, the Lord is saying, 'I will take that stony heart out of you and give you the capacity to be rooted and grounded in love, in Him.'

This is the process of being born of water. It is the implication of being *baptised into the fellowship of the body of Christ*.

Born of the Spirit to enter the kingdom

'I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgements and do them.' Eze 36:27.

This person has been born of the Spirit to *enter* the kingdom.

The Spirit (the Person of the Holy Spirit) is given to us to *enable* us to walk into all truth.

He is writing this law on our heart so that we are not reaching up to fulfil it through the exercise of our flesh. He is enabling it to become our very nature.

How does He do this? It is by His *pouring the love of God into our hearts*. This is what it means to be 'born of the Spirit'.

The word of the Everlasting Covenant

'Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.' Eze 36:28.

This is the statement of God's Everlasting Covenant.

King David recognised that his life and his household was 'not so with God', yet he had received the word of the Everlasting Covenant and was secure and sure and steadfast in the Lord because of that word.

Delivered from our uncleanness

And this is what the Lord is saying to us today.

'I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses.' Eze 36:9.

I am amazed at the way that the Lord said this. You would think that He would deliver us from all of our uncleanness at the beginning, to make us all nice and perfect, so that we could obtain our inheritance readily.

The reality is that we *obtain* our inheritance, and *then* we continue in *fellowship, on that land*, which, we have understood, is also a *pathway of offering* through which we are being delivered from all our uncleanness.

The Lord brings multiplication

Then He said, 'I will call for the grain and multiply it.'

Remember that, in reading about the mina, the servants who were illuminated and understood, recognised that it was the Lord Himself, that which they have received from *Him*, which caused the multiplication.

He then said, 'I will call for the grain and multiply it and bring no famine upon you.' Eze 36:30.

In this situation, we will not be short and bereft of the word of God as the food to sustain us.

'I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields, so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations.' Eze 36:30.

Multiplication equates to good ground

This is the statement of what it means to be good ground.

You see, we did nothing for that, did we? All we did was to hear and *receive* the command of the Lord, and to *accept* His word, and *hold fast* to it.

The one who is doing all the work in relation to our heart is the Lord Himself.

But we are to hold fast to that word and to walk in obedience to it. It is the Holy Spirit who is helping us to remain connected to this process.

The subject of good ground reveals to us the principle of *firstfruits*. The fruit that comes up on good ground is called 'firstfruits'.

The firstfruits were an offering that the children of Israel made to God under the law covenant. They offered the first yield of the crops that they had sown each season.

Firstfruits and firstborn

It is interesting that this word 'firstfruits' is based on the same Hebrew word for 'firstborn'.

We can see the connection between 'firstfruits', that which comes up from the ground after the seed has taken root and been established in a person's heart, and 'the firstborn' which speaks about sonship.

The important point to understand is that Christ is the Firstborn, and to be part of the Firstborn is to be part of the fellowship of Christ.

Not an expression of our individuality

From this, we come to understand that firstfruits is not you and I *individually* expressing *our* sonship.

Rather, firstfruits is seen in our living and effective *participation in the fellowship of Christ*.

In the past, we have tended to think of firstfruits, or the fruit brought forth on good ground, as being the expression of our 'own' sonship.

We have been seen as 'good-ground' people, where something is birthed, and our good character, values, and expression, even Christian culture, have led to our being recognised as firstfruits.

We have thought of firstfruits as being the expression of our own sonship, evidenced in our works, our character, our ministry expression, our knowledge, our experience, even our 'position' in the church.

As a result, we have viewed firstfruits as a level of 'Christian attainment' to be pursued.

This, however, is very much secondary to the reality of firstfruits.

The true nature of firstfruits - our life is hidden with Christ in God

These expressions of our 'attainment' are not indicative of firstfruits nor the evidence of good ground, because they all relate to 'the expression of us'.

Having died with Christ, we are 'hidden with Christ in God'. Col 3:3.

Therefore, firstfruits is not about 'our expression' at all. If we have died with Christ and are hidden with Him, what are the firstfruits that are indicative of a person whose heart is good ground?

The answer is given to us by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians.

'But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

'For since by man came death, by the Son of Man also came the resurrection of the dead.

'For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.' 1Co 15:20-22.

Christ, the firstfruits of all who have died

Paul made a vital point here. He said that Jesus is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 1Co 15:20.

Who, then, are those who have 'fallen asleep'?

This does not just refer to those who are already dead.

Rather, it refers to all of those who are *conformed to His death*. Do you see the point?

We are not firstfruits believers because we have obtained our *own* sonship by the Seed.

We are firstfruits believers because, having been *born*, we then *lose* our life, in Him, so that we may *find* it.

'But each one in his own order [there is an order here]: Christ the Firstfruits, and afterwards those who are Christ's at His coming.' 1Co 15:23.

You and I are not firstfruits *before* Christ. Christ is the Firstfruits, and we are firstfruits *in Him*.

We read, '*Afterwards* those who are Christ's at His coming.'

You might now be thinking that we become firstfruits when He comes a second time.

Behold, He is coming with clouds

That is not His 'coming', however. How do we know this? John said, 'Behold He is coming *now* with clouds.' Rev 1:7.

What are these 'clouds'? They are 'a great cloud of witnesses' who are journeying on the pathway of offering and sufferings which Christ pioneered for you and me.

We are firstfruits if we are part of that company who are journeying with Him.

The order of His coming

We also know that Paul was not referring to the second coming, because the very next verse noted, 'Then comes the end.' 1Co 15:24.

This indicates that there is an *order* in these events.
Christ is the Firstfruits.

We are firstfruits *afterwards*, in Him, who are Christ's *at* His coming. This means that He is coming to us with clouds. He is being *proclaimed* through the word of the cross.

As we receive that word of the cross, are birthed, and join the fellowship of His offering, we become firstfruits in Him.

Behold a *new creation*, in Christ!

Then comes the end

'Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.' 1Co 15:24.

The coming of the end occurs when this process of the *kingdom* - those who have been born of God and come into Christ - is complete. There is a process at work to see this great company come to perfection.

The church age is an age of *sifting*!

We have heard this spoken of prophetically in the recent season.

Our hearts are already good ground

As we journey each day with Christ, where tribulation and persecution come because of the word, we need to respond in faith at every point. As we *live by the faith of the Son of God*, we will be kept safe and secure within the kingdom, having been born of God.

This is what the principle of the different grounds refers to.

The 'grounds' are not the things that you have to 'get through' to get to good ground.

You are already good ground.

The grounds that you negotiate along the way are so that you do not fall away.

The kingdom of God is a context in which judgement is in progress.

We are to be those who live by that word, who accept it, understand it, and lay hold of that for which Christ has laid hold of us.

If we do that, that word is steadfast and sure, and we will most certainly inherit - some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, some one hundredfold.

However, if we don't negotiate the issues of the grounds of our heart, then those grounds will define our end.

We are firstfruits in the fellowship of Christ

The key point is that Christ is the Firstfruits, and for us to be firstfruits also is to be *in the fellowship of Christ*. That is easy, isn't it?

There is no 'standard of righteousness' that we have to attain to be a firstfruits Christian; we simply need to be *in Christ*.

Now, what does it mean to be 'in Christ'? How do we get there so that we are demonstrating firstfruits?

The Seed, Christ, germinating in our heart

When Christ the Seed comes into our heart, we receive our name as a son of God. We discussed this some weeks ago in relation to stony ground.

Our human identity (the ground of our heart) is redefined by this new name. We receive a new heart and a new spirit. This is the point of *germination*.

There is enough capacity in the Seed for new life to emerge, which is such a great provision.

This means that we have no excuse for not bringing forth fruit. Another way of saying it is the reason why we don't bring forth fruit is completely *our accountability*, because the seed itself was able to germinate.

In other words, as we learnt from the passage in Ezekiel, there is enough *capacity* in the Seed for the ground of our heart to be made 'good'.

We don't make our heart good, and neither are we naturally good. We simply need to allow that Seed to germinate. When it happens, that is good ground.

Participating in the offering and sufferings of Christ

However, we are only able to grow up as sons of God when we are conformed to His death and to the fellowship of His offering, as a member of the body of Christ.

As we learnt in relation to stony ground, unless we are joined to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus through baptism, we will die again. That is not the dying that is 'conformed to His death'; that is dying as *part of the body of death*.

The life of God is multiplied to become our life only as we maintain *a committed participation* in the offering and sufferings of Christ.

Christ is our life; our name is written in Him

Significantly, Christ is our life, but *He is not our name*. This is an important point to realise, and will help us to understand firstfruits in our lives.

Our name is written *in* Christ and, when He comes into us, we obtain our name. But Christ has His own name. We have our own name, but *the life that we live is common to all* who are part of the Sheaf of firstfruits, who is Christ.

So, there is a distinction between name and life, but the name has no expression without the life, and the life is to be expressed *by a name*. This is precious, isn't it?

This is the culture of offering.

Significantly, Christ is our *life*, but He is not our name.

While each son of God has a unique name, we all share the same life in Christ. This is actually true for the Godhead Themselves, isn't it? They don't have separate lives; They live by one life, but Each has a unique name and capacity to express that life.

We are being called into that very fellowship.

Christ, the Sheaf of firstfruits – He in us and we in Him

This reality is revealed in the Sheaf of firstfruits.

Think about it this way – there is a single Seed, Christ; He falls into the ground of humanity and comes up as a sheaf.

When we refer to a 'sheaf', it includes stalks and seed heads. The sheaf is the cluster of all the other seeds that have come up as a result of that one seed being buried.

We observe that Christ spoke of Himself as being a grain of wheat that fell into the ground and died. Those who are conformed to His death and are buried with Him rise from the death of sin with Him.

They are *in Him*, and *He is in them*.

Do you see that both of these elements need to be true? We need to receive the Seed, Christ. And, when we receive the Seed and are baptised into Christ, the reality is that we are *in* Christ as part of

the Sheaf of firstfruits, and Christ is also in us. This is *the life that we now live*.

Unique grains in the one Seed, Christ

Each grain of wheat in a sheaf is unique. If you peel back the leaves of the sheaf and see all of the grains at the head of the plant, you would note that every one of those seeds is unique. It is not just one huge seed; it is lots of little seeds that have come from *one* seed.

Just as each grain of wheat in a sheaf is unique, you and I, with Christ, are unique sons of God; but every one that is in that Sheaf shares the same life. There are unique seeds, or unique names, unique expressions, but everyone is of the same life.

Importantly, we note that Jesus is the first Seed, from which the rest have sprung. He was the One who went into the ground and came up.

But He is also the principal Seed at the top of the firstfruits sheaf; *the Head of the body*. Can you see that He is part of His own body?

And we are part of His body. It is one Sheaf; He is the principal Seed, but we all have our name as sons of God in Him, and we all *live by the same life*.

We are firstfruits in Christ

This highlights the truth that the *fruit* that is brought forth on good ground is not our individual expression as a son of God; nor is it who we think we should be or what we think we should be doing.

Do you see that that is a *deluded* understanding of firstfruits? It is a deluded understanding of good ground.

If you think that way, your 'goodness' is the basis of what you do.

However, it has nothing to do with *what you do*; it has to do with *where you live!*

Are you *in Christ*? If so, you are a new creation. You are firstfruits *in Him*.

The fruit that is brought forth on good ground is our *participation as sons of God* in the fellowship of Christ, the Sheaf of firstfruits. This is where we are hidden with Christ in God.

'For you died [when you were baptised into Christ], and your [*zoe*-sonship] life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life

appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.' Col 3:3-4.

That is the reality of good ground.

This is a wonderful point, and highlights that we are actually expressing firstfruits much earlier than many people realise.

It may run in one of two ways. There will be those who *presume* that they are firstfruits because of their history; because of their training; because of their self-confidence; because of the abundance of gift, whatever it is.

Then there will be others who think that they are *not* firstfruits because they struggle with some past history; they might feel as though they don't know very much; they might not be very personally confident.

Both of those views of firstfruits are *false*.

Can you see that we are firstfruits because *we are in Christ*?

This is the definition of firstfruits.

Do you see that firstfruits belongs to those who are *illuminated*? I pray that you are illuminated today to your sonship; to your firstfruits expression as part of the body of Christ.

His love and life compel us to participate in the fellowship of the body of Christ

Firstfruits is the realisation that we belong - *you belong* - to the fellowship of the body of Christ, and are compelled by the love of God poured into your heart, by the Holy Spirit, to *participate* in this fellowship.

It is the very same fellowship of Yahweh Himself; the life which you have received *compels* you to participate.

We participate by laying down zoe-life to reveal another

Very simply, that participation will vary for each of us, because we each have a unique name.

But it is the same *motivation* to participate; it is the same *way* that we participate.

How do we participate?

It is by *laying down our life to reveal another*.

But the way in which you do that and the way in which I do that will be unique to our name.

Fulfilling the will of God, not our will

That is called *sanctification* - *the will of God* in Christ Jesus.

Each of us has a sanctified participation, and it is not our will that we are to exercise.

It is *the will of God in Christ Jesus* that we are to fulfil by multiplying His life according to our unique name and sanctification. These are 'works prepared for us' by the Father.

We are not to be those who name ourselves or who walk according to the sight of our own eyes.

That is the issue of all the other grounds that causes us to fall away from the reality of fellowship in the Sheaf of firstfruits.

We are made to be good ground; not striving to attain

Moreover, it is important to note that we are not 'making our way through the grounds in order to get to good ground'.

It is not that we are a group of people who are wayside and, as soon as we get over our 'waysideness', we can move on to stony ground. There, we have to 'fuddle' around and deal with our offences and stumbling, and perhaps only a percentage of us get through. And then, 'oh my goodness', we have to negotiate thorny ground. Eventually, if we are good enough, and try hard enough, we will have a heart of good ground. That is complete nonsense!

You are *all* the grounds; but you have been *made good ground* by that seed germinating in your heart.

So give attention to *keeping your heart with all diligence*. That is what the Holy Spirit is helping you to do.

The Scriptures teach us this very point, and we will read from Proverbs to demonstrate the point that we do not have to *try* to attain firstfruits or to arrive at a 'good-ground' expression.

We are made to have a heart of good ground *by the word*.

Keeping ourselves in the love of God

And our work, then, is to *keep ourselves in the love of God*.

How do we do that? It is by *praying in the Holy Spirit*, 'building up ourself up in our most holy faith'.

Why is that? It is because, by that faith, we walk and live by the life which is in the firstfruits Sheaf.

I don't know about you, but I am very happy about good ground. I am confident that I am good ground - not because I have attained something or because I have some sort of understanding or expression, but because I have been *kept in the name by the Lord Himself*.

The path of a son of God

We will look at a passage and see how, not only in the New Covenant are we compelled to this understanding, but the entire Scripture compels us to this understanding.

'But the path of the just is like the shining [light] sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.' Pro 4:18.

To be born of God is to be a son of light; s-o-n of light.

Now 'the just' refers to a *righteous* person. A person who is righteous is not merely 'really good'. A person who is righteous is *becoming* who God predestined them to be - and that is to be *His son*.

You could say that the path of sonship is like the shining sun that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day; it is a pathway that we are walking on.

As we walk by the light that is shining on the next step, we are *becoming* that light.

'The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble. My son [He is talking to you and me, who are sons of God], give attention [be diligent!] to My words; incline your ear to My sayings.' Pro 4:19-20.

This person wants to be *discipled by the word*.

They are not giving themselves to be discipled by a figure, a guru-like figure - that would be wayside ground, wouldn't it?

This person wants their ear 'pierced to the door of the tabernacle' itself, connected to the very fellowship of the doorkeepers, which is the presbytery. They are the ones who stand at the Door, who is Christ.

'Incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes [that is the same as those who 'accept' the word; that is the word taking root]; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they are *life* to those who find them, and health to all their flesh.' Pro 4:21-22.

This is the *exanastasis* life that is becoming your possession as a son of God. It is *eternal* life that you are receiving now, and becomes yours forever.

'Life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh.'

This describes a person who has been born of the incorruptible Seed, through the living and abiding word of God.

Keeping your heart with all diligence

This is the key for us to receive and understand today.

'Keep your heart with all *diligence*.' Pro 4:23.

You have *already* received the treasure, and that treasure is like a shining light that becomes brighter and brighter as you walk on the path with Christ Himself.

So, what do you need to do?

Keep your heart with all diligence. For what reason? 'For out of it spring the issues of life.' Pro 4:23.

Paul, in Hebrews chapter six, as we discussed last week, laid out exactly the same principle.

He said, 'Not laying again all these foundations that mark you as being born to see the kingdom, and then being born to enter.'

And then he said, 'What is our biggest issue? It is not being *diligent* in relation to the issues of life.'

Thorny ground, for most of us, is where our attention and diligence is needed in order for us to keep our heart.

'Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.' Pro 4:23.

Remember that Jesus said that good ground is the heart of a person who keeps the word in a 'noble and good heart'.

So, *keep* what is noble and good - you have received it as a gift!

'The good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it.' Luk 8:15.

It is not that they hold on to the word as some sort of 'doctrinal security'.

It means that they are *keeping their own heart*, which has been made good by that word.

We do not have to work through the grounds to reach good ground.

We *have been made good ground*, and must be diligent to keep our heart, because that affects how we walk and grow in the life of God.

Putting away deceit in our heart and mouth

How do we 'keep our heart'?

That is the obvious question about good ground, isn't it?

It is not, 'How do I *get* to be good ground?' You *are* it!

The question that we need to answer is, 'How do I *keep* my heart, because out of it spring the issues of life?'

Helpfully, Solomon gave us the answer.

'Put away from you a deceitful mouth.'

You are responsible, and I am responsible, for what comes out of our mouth, because what comes out of our mouth is indicative of what is *in our heart*.

Whose job is it to put that away? Is God going to 'zap' you so that deceit does not come out of your mouth?

No, He says, 'You put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you.' Pro 4:24.

This is a person who is quick to hear and slow to speak, isn't it?

On the other hand, the 'perverse' do not speak by the Spirit, who is like the wind. Rather, they immediately react out of the flesh of their own heart.

He is saying, 'Quieten down.' Remember that we spoke about this recently - 'Be *still* and *know* that He is God'.

This is a person who is *repentant*, isn't it? They are turning and looking into the face of God. When we do that, every mouth is stopped.

Being diligent to let the light of the word shine on our path, and in our homes together

'Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you. Let your eyes look straight ahead.' Pro 4:25.

Remember that thorny ground is the heart of one who desires other things. Their eyes are tempted

by all the other words and other offerings that define another life.

Don't be lazy in relation to the infiltration of that into our lives and our hearts.

What, then, do we do?

'Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you.' Pro 4:25.

This involves looking right down to where the light is shining on *your next step*.

Remember that the word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. The very *next step* is where we keep our eyes. This is why we need to be diligent in relation to the word, and to let it shine light on how we live in our houses together.

'Ponder the path of your feet.'

We have to think about the way that we are walking and we do need to ask the question, 'Am I walking on the pathway that the Lord has pioneered for me; or am I trying to establish another pathway; or am I walking on a broad way that does not lead to life?'

Do you see that we actually need to give some accountable and responsible reflection, not just individually, but also as a household? This is what we are discussing together, isn't it?

'Ponder' - it is a lovely word! Just sit and think about your path for a moment. 'Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established.' Pro 4:26. 'Established' means 'rooted, grounded, steadfast' in the love of God.

'Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil.' Pro 4:27.

Being diligent with wayside, stony, thorny issues

A person becomes 'wayside' in their heart when they do not ask, seek or knock for the gospel of sonship.

So we are made to be good ground when the seed is germinated in us, and then we come into Christ. But we also still have hard hearts that need to be broken up. We heard the exhortation, 'Break up the fallow ground. It is time to seek the Lord.'

We also have 'stony' issues within us that cause us to stumble relationally with one another - when we are offended by a situation or by the word or activity of a brother or sister.

We have 'thorny' propensities within us which are the cares of the world, or the desire for riches, the deceitfulness of riches.

So we have these elements.

Where we don't give diligent attention to these issues, they become the definition of our life.

Do you see that we have it around the wrong way? We think that we have to 'work through them' to get to the goal. No, we have - behold! Be *illuminated* to see that you are already a son of God!

The issue is not whether you can 'get' there or not; the issue is whether you will *keep it*.

Be diligent in relation to *wayside* ground regarding repentance and faith as foundations. That is the point of 'understanding', isn't it?

If we don't give attention to relational offence (rather, we hold on to our offences), we are not rooted and grounded in love, so we become defined as *stony-hearted* ground.

Our heart becomes *thorny* ground when we are lazy, and are drawn away by the desires for other things - but 'it is not so' for you and me, brethren.

This pathway of life is the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings

I love the way that Paul wrote, particularly in Hebrews, where He established these principles. He said, in effect, 'But there is a word of faith that you can receive and then walk by, because you are already here listening to the word.'

We are to live from faith to faith, walking in the way, in simplicity and sincerity.

If we will do that - if we will consider the fellowship of the offering and sufferings of Christ as being the pathway of life through which the Holy Spirit is leading us and joining us to the process through which we are delivered from these other grounds - we will bear fruit; and we *are* bearing fruit already.

The pathway on which we are walking is the pathway of sonship that we journey *with*, and *in*, Christ, in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings.

As slaves of righteousness, we walk in the will of the Father

Through this fellowship, we are set free from our slavery to sin, and can participate in our spiritual service of worship as slave of righteousness.

That is an amazing point, isn't it? If you are a slave of sin, you can not help but sin.

But, when you are set free and are joined to Christ, you are made a slave of righteousness, by the Holy Spirit, so that you want to do the works of righteousness, which are your sonship in Christ.

As slaves of righteousness who obey the doctrine of baptism, we obtain the *fruit* of our sanctification as sons of God.

And what is this fruit?

This fruit is *the will of God being done*. Rom 6.

This means that we fulfil the Father's will for our lives by doing the works that belong to our names as sons of God in Christ. The outcome of living according to this way is eternal life. Rom 6:22.

Next week we will continue to speak about what firstfruits 'looks like', practically, for us individually, as families, and as a community of believers together.