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“What Hinders Fruitfulness?”

Mark 4:1-9

Pastor Gary Hamrick

When the Bible calls us to be fruitful; it means that the qualities, characteristics, and virtues of Jesus should be more and more evident in our lives. But what are some of the things that hinder fruitfulness? In the parable of the sower Jesus explained that Satan, persecution, and the world are three things that hinder our fruitfulness.

1. The parable of the sower
 - a. This account of Jesus teaching from a boat to a large crowd took place at Capernaum, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.
 - b. A parable is a story drawn from everyday life that illustrates a deeper truth.
 - c. The point of a parable was not always obvious, and it often required Jesus’ hearers to think differently about the things that Jesus shared.
 - i. **Mark 4:10** - *“But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable.”*
 - d. Some of the seed amounted to nothing depending upon where it landed, and some seed produced a great harvest in varying amounts.
 - e. Four types of soil
 - i. Along the path
 1. **Mark 4:4** - *“And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell **by the wayside**; and the birds of the air came and devoured it.”* (Emphasis added)
 - ii. Rocky places
 1. **Mark 4:5** - *“Some fell on **stony ground**...”* (Emphasis added)
 - iii. Among thorns
 1. **Mark 4:7** - *“And some seed fell **among thorns**...”* (Emphasis added)
 - iv. Good ground
 1. **Mark 4:8** - *“But other seed fell on **good ground**...”* (Emphasis added)

added)

- f. Pastor Gary said, “[If] I was there, I would have asked Jesus this question, ‘Why wasn’t the farmer more careful?’ ... This is one of the few parables that he [explained] for us, and I’m glad that he [did, in [Mark 4:13-20](#).]”

2. The point of the parable

- a. Pastor Gary said, “This is a parable... that a lot of Christians read and then they try to determine what soil [they are]. And [this] causes angst among some people who read this parable and then think [to themselves], ‘Am I the good soil? Am I producing fruit because if I’m not, am I thorny soil [or stony soil or soil on the path]? What kind of soil am I? Am I really saved?!’ ... I don’t believe this parable is about who is saved and who isn’t saved although there is an element of salvation in this parable... [I think] this parable is more about who is fruitful and who is not, and more importantly, what hinders fruitfulness in the life of the Believer? ... Now, when I say fruitfulness, [what I mean is does a person] exemplify the characteristics, the qualities, and the virtues of Jesus more and more in [their life]? ... [Don’t be concerned about what this means or ask yourself questions like, ‘How can I be fruitful? or What constitutes fruitfulness?’] ... [Jesus, in [John 15:5-8](#), tells us] that if we are connected to him and have a relationship and fellowship with him, you will naturally bear fruit.”

- i. [John 15:5-8](#) - *I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.*”
(Emphasis added)

- b. [Mark 4:13-20](#) - *“And He said to them, ‘Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word’s sake, immediately they stumble. Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.’ ”*

- i. The sower is anyone who shares the Gospel.

- ii. The seed is a picture of the Word of God.
- iii. The soils represent different conditions for those who receive and believe the Word of God, which contributes to the fruitfulness or the unfruitfulness of the individual.
- iv. Pastor Gary said, “Please notice that the condition of the soil is not the only thing that determines fruitfulness. That might be where it all begins, but that’s not the only thing. ... [There are many contributing factors to producing a fruitful crop: like good soil, the right temperature, the right amount of rain and sunshine. There are things that negatively affect a crop like insects, fungus, etc.] ... There is a delicate balance in our spiritual lives that determines fruitfulness. And, what Jesus [was teaching was] that just like in nature, there are some things in our lives that can upset that delicate balance of being fruitful for Jesus.”

3. What hinders fruitfulness?

a. Satanic schemes

- i. The birds mentioned in [Mark 4:4](#) represent Satan.
- ii. [Mark 4:15](#) - *“And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, **Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.**”* (Emphasis added)
- iii. Pastor Gary said, “Satan is actively at work to hinder your fruitfulness for Jesus. He is! Now, arguably, this first example seems to be a commentary on salvation more than just fruitfulness... [It] is fair to say that in Satan’s attempt to prevent you from ever being a Believer or in the fact that after you have become a Believer, he’s still at work to make you unfruitful, the end result is the same. He doesn’t want anyone to be fruitful for Jesus, either by preventing you from being saved or discouraging you after you are saved. ... Let me tell you how he will typically work; [he works by discouraging, tempting, accusing, and lying to you]. ... [Satan] is neither fictitious [nor] a figment of our imagination. ... He is a fallen angel of the highest order who... attempted a coup in heaven because he wanted to ascend to the throne of God. And he managed to persuade a third of the angels to rebel with him against God, and God expelled them all from heaven... and those fallen angels who rebelled with Satan are now known as demons, and they are in the unseen realm. [They] are actively involved in trying to dissuade you from being a Believer or discouraging you, tempting you, accusing you, or lying to you in order to prevent you from being fruitful for Jesus. ... If you don’t first begin with the reality of Satan and demonic warfare, you will be the first prey. If you are not wise to this and understand how he operates, you are exactly the kind of person that he’s going to go for. ... We need to be on our guard. We need to

put on the full armor of Christ. We need to understand that our strength is in the Lord...”

1. [Luke 8:12](#) - *“Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.”* (Emphasis added)
 2. [2 Corinthians 4:4](#) - *“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”* (NIV 1984)
 3. [Ephesians 6:10-12](#) - *“... be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”*
- iv. In Hebrew, Satan means enemy or adversary.
 - v. Tempter - [Matthew 4:3](#) - *“Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, ‘If You are the Son of God, command these stones become bread.’ ”*
 - vi. Accuser - [Revelation 12:10](#) - *“Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.’ ”*
 - vii. Murderer, liar, father of lies - [John 8:44](#) - *“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”*
 - viii. In Greek, the word is diabolos, which means accuser.
 - ix. Dragon, ancient serpent, deceiver - [Revelation 12:9](#) - *“So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”*
 - x. Satan is first mentioned in the Bible in [Genesis 3:1](#).
 1. [Genesis 3:1a](#) - *“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made.”*
 - xi. Satan is last mentioned in the Bible in [Revelation 20:10](#).
 1. [Revelation 20:10](#) - *“The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beat and the flase prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”*
 - xii. Pastor Gary said, “[Satan] fights on the battleground of your mind. He whispers lying thoughts, accusing thoughts, discouraging thoughts, [and] tempting thoughts. ... You have to take [these things] captive because he’s going to constantly be doing this to you. Lying to you

[and] trying to convince you [not] to get saved, and if you do get saved, trying to convince you that you are not really saved. Lying to you that you are not loved, that you don't have what it takes, that you are better off dead, that you are ugly, that you are stupid, that you are not the biological gender of your birth, that things are hopeless, that she would be a better wife than the one you have, that he would be a better husband than the one you have, that just one more drink or one more hit will make everything better, and on and on the lies go one after another. Every way Satan can try to get in your head, he will. Know what he is about, understand and recognize when he's doing it, and then take captive every thought in the name of Jesus!"

1. **2 Corinthians 10:3-5** - *"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."* (NIV 1984) (Emphasis added)
2. Pastor Gary said, "Husbands, pray for your wife's thought life; her mind. ... Satan first went after Eve... to deceive her in her mind [to insinuate] that God was not good, and God was holding back his best. He went for the woman first, meanwhile Adam passively stood by and did nothing. ... He should have stepped in to protect his wife. He should have [said, 'Eve, turn away from him, don't look at him. God loves you; he loves me, he wants his best for you and me. Don't rob yourself of God's best by believing this liar.'] ... Now, let me make it clear, men are just as susceptible to believing lies too, but women are particularly vulnerable, and husbands can be that prayer covering for them, and dads for their daughters."

b. Personal persecution

- i. **Mark 4:16-17** - *"These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble."* (Emphasis added)
- ii. Pastor Gary said, "When you are persecuted for your faith it tends to make a person less fruitful because we get discouraged, we get weighed down, we get attacked, we get frustrated by the things that people might do to us. ... [This] is only getting worse in our culture. ... Whether it's intentional or not, I don't know, but the target is the Church. [To] limit the freedom of worship guaranteed by our Constitution's First Amendment, the overreach of government is

infringing upon Christians' rights. ... There is a concerted effort to intimidate Christians, and to marginalize Christians, and to discredit Christians, and when you feel that persecution for your faith... it causes you to wither and not be fruitful. ... It's to be expected. ... Just be courageous and bold for [Jesus]."

1. "Christian persecution is happening right here at home, on our own soil. Many here are attacked for their faith too. While it might not be at the level of beheadings or burned down churches as seen in other places of the world, it still is a problem that is growing. Traditional Christians are facing increasing intolerance in this country through the fines, the lawsuits, the jobs lost, and the public disdain felt." ¹
2. Pastor Gary referred to Ken Starr's book *Religious Liberty in Crisis, Exercising Your Faith in an Age of Uncertainty*.
3. **Matthew 10:22** - *"And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved."*

c. Worldly wants

- i. **Mark 4:18-19** - *"Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."* (Emphasis added)
- ii. Pastor Gary said, "We have to live in this world, but we can't allow the pull of this world to choke out our lives for Jesus, where we become more consumed with treasures and possessions and ambitions and pleasures more than living a fruitful life for Christ."
- iii. **Matthew 6:32-33** - *"For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."*

4. The best place for Christians to be

- a. **Mark 4:20** - *"But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."*

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Mark 4:1-9** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Provide an overview of the parable of the sower, the four types of soil, etc., as outlined by Pastor Gary. (See #1 above)

¹ <https://www.beliefnet.com/news/is-there-christian-persecution-in-america.aspx>

3. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks about the main point of this parable. (See #2a above)
4. Read and discuss [John 15:5 8](#). (See #2a-i above)
5. Ask the group to describe some of the ways they have seen their growing relationship with the Lord be a vital part of being fruitful in their Christian life.
6. Read [Mark 4:13–20](#) and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about the condition of the soil. (See #2b above)
7. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's remarks about the ways the enemy is actively working to hinder fruitfulness in the life of the Believer. (See #3a-iii above)
8. Read and discuss [2 Corinthians 4:4](#) and [Ephesians 6:10–12](#). (See #3a-iii above)
9. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about the battleground of the mind. (See #3a-xii above)
10. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's remarks about persecution affecting fruitfulness. (See #3b-ii above)
11. Allow the people in your group to share personal experiences or the experiences of other Christians they know who have been persecuted for their faith.
12. Read and discuss [Matthew 6:32–33](#), plus Pastor Gary's comments about the cares and concerns of this world being a hindrance to fruitfulness. (See #3c above)
13. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)