

# Focus On Farming - Breaking Up Your Fallow Ground

## Lesson One Teaching Notes

### BIBLE READING: JEREMIAH 4:3

Any good farmer will tell you that before one can grow any kind of a garden, one must first plow up the ground where the garden will be.

- It is only after the plowing that one can begin the process of sowing and reaping.
  - So, with that in mind, we will begin our Focus on Farming series.

**Jeremiah 4:3 – *For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.***

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. BREAK UP YOUR FALLOW GROUND

One very important lesson we must learn from these passages focuses on the phrase, “break up your fallow ground,” is that fallow ground is either that which, having once been tilled, has long lay uncultivated; or, it is ground that is slightly plowed, in order to be plowed again before it is planted (or sown).

The Church breaks up her own fallow ground, when she stirs up anew the decaying righteousness of her own members...

- This is caused when, by preaching the unadulterated Word of God, conviction grips the heart of the hearer, and the church is compelled to repent.
- Once the fallow ground of the heart is broken up by repentance, and righteous seed is planted, the church will naturally begin to reap a

harvest of new people hungry for the life-changing experience of the Holy Ghost.

**PASTORAL NOTE:** One should not be satisfied with a slight furrowing of the heart; rather, let the land that was fallowed (slightly plowed) be broken up again with a deep furrow of true repentance. In other words, one must not be satisfied with a mere stirring of the heart – there must be a true change of thought and life.

Fact is, too many of us have been long uncultivated in righteousness...

- It is time to let true repentance break up our fruitless and hardened hearts; and...
  - When this is done – and when the seed of the Word of Life is sown in them – worldly cares and concerns will not arise and choke out the good seed like thorns.

**IMPORTANT:** Jeremiah warns that one should not sow the seeds of repentance in unfit soil, but just as the farmer prepares the ground, by clearing it of weeds, and exposing it to the sun and air, before planting the seed, so must you regard repentance as a serious matter, requiring forethought, and anxious labor. To sow in ground that has not been properly plowed one might as well sow on land that is full of thorns – it is time and effort wasted.

## II. **A PREPARED HEART**

**READ: James 1:21**

**James 1:21 – *Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.***

James saw the human heart as a garden; if left to itself, the soil would produce only weeds.

- He urged us to **“pull out the weeds”** and prepare the soil for the **“implanted Word of God.”**
- The phrase *“superfluity of naughtiness”* gives the picture of a garden overgrown with weeds that cannot be controlled.
- It is foolish to try to receive God’s Word into an unprepared heart.

**Filthiness** comes from a Greek word, which refers to any sort of moral defilement or impurity.

- It is closely related to a term used of wax in the ear, which impairs hearing, and is therefore especially appropriate in this context.
- Moral filthiness is a serious barrier to our clearly hearing and comprehending the Word of God.

**Wickedness** is from a Greek word that denotes moral evil and corruption in general, especially in regard to intent.

- It pertains to sin that is deliberate and determined.
- It may reside in the heart for a long time before being expressed outwardly, and may in fact, never be expressed outwardly.
- It therefore includes the many “hidden” sins that only the Lord and the individual are aware of.

**Superfluity**, in the Greek, can carry the idea of remains, or surplus, in this context it seems better rendered as the “abundance,” “excess,” or “prevalence” of wickedness.

- The idea is that of confessing, repenting of, and eliminating every vestige and semblance of evil that corrupts our lives, reduces our hunger for the Word, and clouds our understanding of it.
- When that is done, we can indeed receive “the word of God,”...not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in [us] who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

#### **A. HOW DO WE PREPARE THE SOIL OF OUR HEARTS FOR GOD’S WORD?**

1. First, by repenting of our sins (I John 1:9).

***1 John 1:9 – If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***

We must get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent.

- According to the Greek, this is a once-for-all action.

Why should we do this?

- Progress in our spiritual life cannot occur unless we see sin for what it is, quit justifying it, and decide to reject it.
- James’s word picture here has us getting rid of our evil habits and actions like stripping off dirty clothes.

2. Second, by meditating of God’s love and grace through His Word, which will cause us to “plow up” any hardness that is within our hearts (Jeremiah 4:3).

3. Finally, we must have an attitude of “meekness” (James 1:21).

Meekness is the opposite of the “wrath” discussed in James 1:19-20.

- When you receive the Word with meekness, you accept it, do not argue with it, and honor it as the Word of God.
- You do not try to twist it to conform it to your thinking.

If we do not receive the implanted Word, then we are deceiving ourselves.

- Christians who like to argue various “points of view” may be only fooling themselves.
- They think that their “discussions” are promoting spiritual growth, when in reality they may only be cultivating the weeds.

### III. THE FARMER (JAMES 5:7-9)

#### James 5:7-9

**7 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.**

**8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.**

**9 Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.**

#### James 5:7-9 (The Message)

**7 Meanwhile, friends, wait patiently for the Master's Arrival. You see farmers do this all the time, waiting for their valuable crops to mature, patiently letting the rain do its slow but sure work.**

**8 Be patient like that. Stay steady and strong. The Master could arrive at any time.**

**9 Friends, don't complain about each other. A far greater complaint could be lodged against you, you know. The Judge is standing just around the corner.**

If a man is impatient, then he had better not become a farmer.

- No crop appears overnight (except perhaps a crop of weeds), and no farmer has control over the weather.
- Too much rain can cause the crop to rot, and too much sun can bum it up.
- An early frost can kill the crop.
  - How long-suffering the farmer must be with the weather!

He must also have patience with the seed and the crop, for it takes time for plants to grow.

- Jewish farmers would plow and sow in what to us are the autumn months.
- The “early rain” would soften the soil.
- The “latter rain” would come in the early spring (our February/March) and help to mature the harvest.
- The farmer had to wait many weeks for his seed to produce fruit.

Why did he willingly wait so long?

- Because the fruit is “precious” (James 5:7).
- The harvest is worth waiting for.
  - **Galatians 6:9 – *In due season we shall reap, if we faint not.***
  - **Mark 4:28-29 – *For the earth produces crops by itself, first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.***

James pictured the Christian as a “spiritual farmer” looking for a spiritual harvest. He admonishes us to be patient and stay steady and strong (James 5:8).

Our hearts are the soil, and the seed is the Word of God ☐ (Luke 8:11).

- There are seasons to the spiritual life just as there are seasons to the soil.
- Sometimes, our hearts become cold and “wintry,” and we have to plow up the fallow ground before the seed can be planted.
- God sends the sunshine and the rains of His goodness to water and nurture the seeds planted; but we must be patient to wait for the harvest.

**PASTORAL NOTE:** Here is a secret of endurance when the going is tough: ***God is producing a harvest in our lives.*** He wants the “fruit of the Spirit” to grow (Gal. 5:22-23), and the only way He can do it is through trials and troubles. Instead of growing impatient with God and with ourselves, we must yield to the Lord and permit the fruit to grow. Remember, we are “spiritual farmers” looking for a harvest.

You can enjoy this kind of a harvest only if your heart is established (James 5:8).

- One of the purposes of the spiritual ministry of the local church is to establish the heart, according to Paul in Romans 1:11.
- Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica, to establish the young Christians in their faith (I Thess. 3:1-3); and Paul also prayed for them that they might be established (1 Thess. 3:10-13).
- The ministry of the Word of God and prayer are important if the heart is going to be established.

**IMPORTANT:** A heart that is not established cannot bear fruit.

#### **A. WHAT THE SUCCESSFUL FARMER DOES**

1. Keep in mind that the farmer does not stand around doing nothing: he is constantly at work as he looks toward the harvest.

James did not tell these suffering believers to put on white robes, climb a hill, and wait for Jesus to return.

- “Keep working and waiting” was his admonition.
  - **Luke 12:43 – *Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when He cometh shall find so doing.***

2. Nor does the farmer get into fights with his neighbors.

One of the usual marks of farmers is their willingness to help one another.

- Nobody on the farm has time or energy for disputes with the neighbors.

James must have had this in mind when he added, ***“Don’t grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged”*** (James 5:9, NIV).

- Impatience with God often leads to impatience with God’s people, and this is a sin we must avoid.
- If we start using the sickles on each other, we will miss the harvest!

#### IV. **THE SOWER AND THE SOILS (MARK 4:1-20)**

##### **Mark 4:3-9**

**3** *Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow:*

**4** *And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.*

**5** *And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth:*

**6** *But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.*

**7** *And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.*

**8** *And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.*

**9** *And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

This parable helped the disciples understand why Jesus was not impressed by the large crowds that followed Him. He knew that most of them would never produce fruit from changed lives, because the Word He was teaching them was like seed sown into poor soil.

#### **A. THE SOWER**

1. The seed represents God's Word (Luke 8:11) and the sower is the servant of God who shares that Word with others (see I Corinthians 3:5-9).

**Paul states in I Corinthians 3:5-9...**

#### **I Corinthians 3:5-9**

**5** *Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?*

**6** *I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.*

**7** *So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.*

**8** *Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.*

**9** *For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.*

**NOTE:** The human heart is like soil: it must be prepared to receive the seed before that seed can take root and produce a harvest.

Like seed, the Word is alive and able to produce spiritual fruit, but the seed must be planted and cultivated before that harvest will come.

## B. THE SOILS

As in that day, so today, there are four kinds of hearts and they respond to God's message in four different ways.

1. The hard heart (Mark 4:4, 15) resists the Word of God and makes it easy for Satan (the birds) to snatch it away.

Soil becomes hard when too many feet tread on it.

- Those who recklessly "open their hearts" to all kinds of people and influences are in danger of developing hard hearts (see Proverbs 4:23).
  - **Proverbs 4:23 – *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.***
  - **Proverbs 4:23 (The Message) – *Keep vigilant watch over your heart; that's where life starts.***
- Hard hearts must be "plowed up" before they can receive the seed, and this can be a painful experience (Jeremiah 4:3; Hosea 10:12).
  - **Hosea 10:12 – *Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.***
  - **Hosea 10:12 (The Message) – *Sow righteousness, reap love. It's time to till the ready earth, it's time to dig in with GOD, Until he arrives with righteousness ripe for harvest.***

2. The shallow heart (vv. 5-6, 16-17).

This heart is like thin soil on a rock very typical to Palestine.

- Since there is no depth, whatever is planted cannot last because it has no roots.

This represents the “emotional hearer” who joyfully accepts God’s Word but does not really understand the price that must be paid to become a genuine Christian.

- There may be great enthusiasm for several days or weeks; but when persecution and difficulties begin, the enthusiasm wanes and the joy disappears.

### 3. The crowded heart (vv. 7, 18-19).

This heart pictures the person who receives the Word but does not truly repent and remove the “weeds” out of his or her heart.

- This hearer has too many different kinds of “seeds” growing in the soil – worldly cares, a desire for riches, a lust for things – and the good seed of the Word has no room in which to grow.
- To change the image, this person wants to walk the “broad way” and the “narrow way” at the same time (Matt 7:13-14); and it cannot be done.

#### **Matthew 7:13-14**

***13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:***

***14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.***

#### **Matthew 7:13-14 (The Message)**

***13 “Don't look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do.***

***14 The way to life — to God! — is vigorous and requires total attention.***

### 4. The fruitful heart (vv. 8, 20).

This heart pictures the true believer, because fruit – a changed life – is the evidence of true salvation (II Corinthians 5:17; Gal 5:19-23).

- Not all true believers are equally as productive; but from every genuine Christian's life, there should be some evidence of spiritual fruit.

**IMPORTANT:** Each of the three fruitless hearts is influenced by a different enemy: **the hard heart** – the devil himself snatches the seed; **the shallow heart** – the flesh counterfeits religious feelings; **the crowded heart** – the things of the world smother the growth and prevent a harvest. These are the three great enemies of the Christian: the world, the flesh, and the devil (see Ephesians 2:1-3).

### Ephesians 2:1-3

*1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;*

*2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:*

*3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*

### Ephesians 2:1-3 (Amplified) –

*1 AND YOU [He made alive], when you were dead (slain) by [your] trespasses and sins*

*2 In which at one time you walked [habitually]. You were following the course and fashion of this world [were under the sway of the tendency of this present age], following the prince of the power of the air. [You were obedient to and under the control of] the [demon] spirit that still constantly works in the sons of disobedience [the careless, the rebellious, and the unbelieving, who go against the purposes of God].*

*3 Among these we as well as you once lived and conducted ourselves in the passions of our flesh [our behavior governed by our corrupt and sensual nature], obeying the impulses of the flesh and the thoughts of the mind [our cravings*

dictated by our senses and our dark imaginings]. *We were then by nature children of [God's] wrath and heirs of [His] indignation, like the rest of mankind.*

## V. CONCLUSION

### A. BROKEN THINGS

READ: Hosea 10:12; John 12:24

Hosea 10:12 – *Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.*

John 12:24 – *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*

This is not the order of husbandry, according to Barnes' Notes Commentary on Hosea 10:12.

- The ground was already plowed, harrowed and sown; and now the Lord tells Israel anew to, "Break up your fallow ground."

Fallow ground lies idle and uncultivated; it is covered with weeds and thorns. The fallow ground of our hearts – that which has been untouched in quite a while – must be broken.

It is very important that we understand something...

- There is no blessing without effort.
- There is no harvest without plowing.
- There is no making without breaking.
  - Before the house is made the tree must be broken.
  - Before the house is made the rocks must be broken.

- Before life there must be death.

Thorns and weeds must be plowed under, and the seed must be planted and die in order for the grain to come.

- Grain dies so new life will bring forth more grain (John 12:24).

1. Before joy there is weeping (Psalm 30:5).

***Psalms 30:5 – For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.***

2. Life is full of brokenness.

Life starts out with broken toys.

- Then life progresses to broken hopes, shattered dreams and unfulfilled ideals.
- In marriage there is broken hearts and sometimes broken homes through divorce or even death.
- In the final stages of life, we have to contend with broken health.

3. But all these say that God is making something new! (See Romans 8:28-29).

**Romans 8:28-29**

***28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.***

***29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.***