

Discovering the Secrets of God's Kingdom

Luke 8:1-15

Most of us don't like being left out of the loop. Being in the know can be good and advantageous unless you're involved in Insider Trading. In case you're not familiar, Insider Trading involves utilizing private knowledge about a company's inner workings and using it in the trading of a public company's stock or other securities. In various countries, like the US, Insider Trading is illegal. This is due to the unfair advantage it gives to investors with insider knowledge to make larger profits than typical investors who are not privy to what's happening behind closed doors.

While having information that is not available to the public and acting upon it can get you into trouble in some cases, insider information is generally seen as beneficial. People typically like to be in the know.

Some people just want to be in the know because they're nosy. Nevertheless, having inside information has great advantages. For example, to know that someone is selling a house before it actually goes on the market and buying it directly from the seller, can be beneficial.

What makes it possible for people to be in the know—to have access to insider information? Often it has to do with the people you know and have close relationships with.

In our text, when the closest disciples of Jesus asked Him about the meaning of His kingdom teachings, He responded: *"To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God..."* Luke 8:9b

I want to submit to you that believers, especially those who have a close and intimate relationship with God, have access to the ultimate insider information. They know the secrets of the Kingdom of God.

What's more, they are not just in the know, they are empowered to act on that insider information from the Lord for their eternal good and the good of others.

Main idea: The Lord confides in those who are close to Him and endeavor by His power to live for His kingdom.

This morning I want us to consider three characteristics of believers who have an intimate relationship with Jesus which gives them deeper knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom.

1. Lean on the Lord Jesus with all humility

The first characteristic of those who possess insider knowledge about God's Kingdom due to their intimate relationship is that they "lean on the Lord Jesus with all humility."

After the worshipful encounter that a former prostitute had with Jesus who received the Lord's gracious forgiveness, Luke continues:

"Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, 2 and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, 3 and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means." Luke 8:1-3

At this point in the earthly ministry of Jesus when hostility from religious leaders was increasing, it doesn't appear that Jesus spoke in Jewish Synagogues as much as He did at the start. But He did continue to enter the homes of those who invited Him and preach to crowds that would gather to listen to His teachings.

And in addition to the crowds that gathered to hear His teachings, Jesus had intimate followers who traveled with Him and supported Him.

It was not unusual in Jesus' day for Jewish Rabbis to have devoted followers who received religious training. However it was unique that Jesus' inner circle of followers included men and women.

Although women in the first century were treated like second class citizens, they played a vital role in the ministry of Jesus and often displayed the greatest devotion and love for Jesus.

As we see in verses 1-3, in addition to the twelve Apostles, who were with Jesus, which speaks to a deeper level of devotion and intimacy, there were also some women among them. On this occasion, the women who Jesus had healed of evil spirits and infirmities, were Mary, called Magdalene, Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna.”

There are some notable things to point out here: Jesus not only invested more time in teaching His close circle of followers, like the twelve, and the named women, they also had a loving and diverse support system that allowed for Jesus to invest His time fulfilling His earthly ministry.

Jesus' followers not only leaned on Him in humility as their Lord, but they would increasingly learn to lean on each other, especially after Jesus ascended to heaven and churches began to form across the Roman Empire. Acts 6:1-7

Again, as we see in our text, the disciples first calling was to be with Jesus. And this continued to be their greatest priority after Jesus ascended into heaven which they achieved through prayer and the word, as the disciple would later testified in Acts 6:4.

Beloved, if we desire to know the deeper things of God in our hearts and not just in our heads, and be effective at ministering to others, we must prioritize cultivating intimacy with Christ. We must learn to lean hard on Jesus in prayer and we must learn to humbly lean on one another.

2. Listen to God's word with their heart attentively

Now after describing that Jesus was traveling to cities and villages with an inner circle of disciples preaching the good news of the

kingdom, Luke records some specifics about a parable that Jesus taught to the crowd.

Before reviewing it, remember that parables are earthly examples Jesus used to illustrate divine secrets about the kingdom of God to His devoted followers.

But there's another side to the parables: To people who were not really listening with a heart to obey the Lord, the parables worked to further harden their hearts.

As Jesus explained to His disciples who asked why he spoke in parables: *"To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand'"* Luke 8:10a

As we will examine more in a moment, the Parables of Jesus not only reveal truth to those who diligently seek it, they also harden the hearts of those who don't care to know and respond to truth. Parables reveal and conceal.

So, with this in mind, the second characteristic of those who possess insider knowledge about God's kingdom due to their intimate relationship with Him is that they **listen to God's word with their hearts attentively.**

Having described that Jesus was traveling to cities and villages with an inner circle of disciples preaching the good news of the kingdom, Luke adds:

"And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, 5 "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. 6 And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. 7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with

it and choked it. 8 And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.” As he said these things, he called out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Luke 8:4-8

Before we unpack this parable, it’s important to note also that Luke chapter eight marks a turning point in the ministry of Jesus. Before beginning to teach in parables, Jesus taught openly for all in the crowd to hear. But many in the crowd were more interested in the miracles that He performed, than in the message that He preached.

Moreover, the religious leaders in the crowd for the most part rejected Jesus and His message. And although He worked great miracles, they willfully and persistently attributed His miracles, which were done by the Spirit, to the devil (Mark 3:22).

Therefore, Jesus turns His attention to a more personal and individual approach to reaching people. He began to teach in parables. Only those who really wanted to hear and know the truth would find it away from the crowd in more intimate settings. Mark 4:10-12.

Conversely, the people whose hearts did not seek Jesus and yield to His word, were hardened.

Concerning this hardening effect of parables, one Bible teacher observed: “Regardless of [a parables] content, those who didn’t hear what they expected refused to hear what Jesus was saying. To understand the parables one has to work at it, and if you don’t, you end up not understanding...[But] in the process of learning, one moves from one level of understanding to a greater level only as one grasps the more elementary levels. Those listening to Jesus—then and today—will move to more difficult insights of his kingdom only as they learn what is primary. For those who reject God’s life in Jesus—as did the religious leaders—the parable ends up as a judge, and as they continue to reject His insights and claims, the more they are unable to understand Him. In that sense, their hearts are further hardened” (Brian C. Stiller).

Now, with that background, let's examine the parable of the sower. Using the metaphor of a farmer sowing seeds, Jesus describes four different hearts or listeners of the word of God, which is represented in the four types of soils.

As we will examine more closely, Jesus describes people who listen with a **callous** heart, a **capricious** heart, a **crowded** heart, and a **cultivated** heart.

At this moment, you are in one of the four categories of listeners. Jesus wants His hearers to listen with cultivated hearts. Which one describes you? Let examine them:

The first word picture that Jesus gives is of the seeds that *fell along the path*. This is the **callous heart**. As Jesus later explained to His inquisitive disciples in a more intimate setting in verse 12:

“The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.” Luke 8:12

Why is Satan able to take away the seed of the word that is being sown or taught? Because where there's callousness and hardness of heart there is no receptivity to the word of God. The person is hearing the word, but they're not really listening. The word of God is falling on deaf ears.

The devil, who is described in 2 Corinthians 4 as the god of this world who blinds the hearts and minds of people, is a thief and a liar. And his work of stealing the seed of the word doesn't just begin when we are hearing the word of God.

The enemy is not only working when the word is being preached to distract you in some way, he was also working before you came to the church.

Among other ways, he works by attempting to feed us with the junk of this world through bad company, social media, and other activities

which will kill your appetite for the word. He's working around the clock to dull the ears, blind the eyes, and deaden your desire for God's word (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

Do you long for the word of God? Do you listen to His word with your heart attentively? Or are you callous or indifferent to the word of God? If you're callous or indifferent to the word of God, it could be that you've never come to saving faith in Jesus.

However, it's possible for a believer to have a diminished capacity and appetite for the word of God. And one main reason for this could be that besides filling your life with activities that dull your spiritual senses, you're also neglecting to daily cultivate intimacy with God in the word, in prayer, and in community with other believers.

Remember, the disciples didn't fully understand the parable at first. But according to Mark's parallel account in Mark 4:10, when they got alone with Jesus they asked Him to teach them the meaning of the parable.

How many of you know, it takes grace filled efforts and work to be a receptive listener—to profit from the reading and preaching of God's word. If you're really serious about growing in the Lord, you must take intentional steps to make God's word a priority in your life.

God longs to speak life giving truths into our lives—to reveal His plan and purposes but we need to get away from all the noise of this world and get alone with God to listen for His voice as we prayerfully read, study, and meditate on His word.

Secondly, Jesus spoke of the seed sown on a rock. This represents a shallow or **capricious heart**. A person who is capricious is a person who is unstable—who is given to sudden and unaccountable changes of mood or behavior. Have you ever witnessed someone who seemed to respond to God's word with great joy, but then suddenly they're no longer around?

Later, when alone with His inquisitive disciples, Jesus explained: *“And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.”* Luke 8:13

Jesus explains here that the seed sown on a rock pictures a person with “no depth of spirituality in his heart. This heart is fickle and shallow. The Word in this heart lacks substance and roots.”

This shallow heart responds to the word, but it’s a purely emotional response. This person gets excited about the word of God. But when the test comes—when trials and temptations arise they fall away.

This so describes the condition of many professing Christians today. When they come to church, they’re looking for an emotional experience more than a transformational experience.

Some want to be inspired and motivated by the preaching of God’s word, but they don’t want real change that comes from obedience to the word.

The word of God will inspire us and at times will illicit great emotions. But emotions can be very shallow and fickle.

As one preacher put it: “Emotions are the shallowest part of our being. And God doesn’t do His deepest work in the shallowest part.” Adrian Rogers

And if all we are looking for is an emotional high from the word—if all we want is for the preacher to make us feel good, but we do not have ears to hear from the Lord, we won’t stand for long. When our faith is put to the test, we will fall away.

Salvation is not found in the thrill or the chill that you might feel in a dynamic church service. Salvation is found when you respond in repentance and faith to the good news that Jesus died to pay for our sin and rose in triumph from the dead. Transformation doesn’t come

when you receive a feeling, but when you receive Jesus as Savior and Lord and grow in His grace and knowledge.

Thirdly, the seed that falls among thorns represents a **crowded heart**, or a divided heart. As Jesus later explained to His devoted disciples:

“And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.” Luke 8:14

Regarding this third condition of the heart, Jesus speaks of seed that is sown among thorns and as a result the thorns choke the seed and prevent it from becoming fruitful.

Jesus explained that this is a picture of one who hears the word, but the competing cares, riches, and pleasures of this life restricts the hearer and does not allow the word to do its transforming work in their hearts.

Jesus is warning us that there are things in our lives that can compete with our devotion to the Word. If we allow the cares, riches, and our own self-centered desires to compete with our devotion to God’s word, we will be choked, we will be restricted, we will crowd out what God through His word wants to do in and through our lives.

Are you allowing the things of this world to crowd what God through His word wants to do in and through your life? What might that be?

Is it Netflix? Your smart phone? A sinful relationship? A desire for material possessions? Living above your means? Things like these can compete with our devotion to not only getting into God’s word, but obeying what God is saying to us through His word.

Finally, Jesus spoke of the seed that falls on good soil. This represents a **cultivated heart**—a heart where the word takes root and brings fruit to the glory of God. While alone with His disciples, Jesus explained:

“As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.”
Luke 8:15

We see here that the good soil describes one who has a sincere and receptive heart—a heart where the seed that is sown is able to take root and bear fruit to the glory of God.

This brings us to the third characteristic of those who know the secrets of the Kingdom.

3. Live for God’s kingdom by obeying His word patiently

Those who know the secrets of the Kingdom because of their closeness with God, live for God’s kingdom by obeying His word patiently.

Now, it’s important to note here that *good soil*, which describes a heart that is receptive to the word and has the capacity to grasp the deeper truths of God, is soil that is carefully cultivated by a farmer.

Similarly, our hearts must be cultivated. And as Jesus describes it, a person with a cultivated heart not only hears the word. A person with a cultivated heart is one whose heart holds fast to the word—who trusts and obeys the word in dependence on the Spirit in good times and bad times, and bears fruit with patience.

How many of you know, we live in a fast-paced world where people are looking for a quick fix for everything in life. We look to diet pills and injections to lose weight. People fall for money making schemes because they’re looking for a fast way out of debt. And often people take the same approach to their spiritual lives.

But there is no quick fix or short cut to becoming a fruit bearing Christian. It takes faithfulness, endurance, and sacrifice. The Holy Spirit produces the fruit. He gives the increase, but we must by the grace that God supplies become more deeply rooted in our relationship with Christ.

Preachers are often blamed when there is a lack of fruit bearing Christians in the church. That can be true at times. But the problem is not always with the sower, and certainly the problem is never with the seed of the word. The lack of fruit can be a problem with the soil—with the heart of the listener.

In Psalm 25:14, the Psalmist reveals this amazing blessing that is the fruit of close communion with the Lord:

“The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.” Psalm 25:14

Interestingly, the Hebrew word translated “friendship” in this verse has the idea of “intimate conversation.” Because of this, some bible translations render it “the secrets of the Lord.”

Elaborating on Psalm 25:14, one devotional writer noted:

“God longs to be intimate with us and reveal His plans and purposes to us. He loves for us to understand His character and nature in deep ways. But this level of relationship is not experienced in casual Christianity, it comes only to those who know full reliance upon God through the work of Christ, and daily dependence upon the Holy Spirit.”

Maclaren says, ‘Obedience and the true fear of Jehovah directly tend to discernment of His purposes, and will besides be rewarded by whispers from heaven.’

What do we miss every day from the Lord simply for lack of listening? What “secrets” of His will for our lives, or our families remain unknown to us because we fail to cultivate an intimacy with the Lord? God is longing to speak to you and me. He is longing to help us know things that are only spiritually discerned. He has a level of understanding and wisdom reserved for those who will simply take the time to stop, listen, and obey.” Troy Keaton

Conclusion

Do you long to have the kind of close relationship with the Lord where you become a confidant of the Lord? Through His death on the cross for our sin and resurrection, Jesus made the way for believers to have a relationship with Him by which we can know the secrets of the Kingdom of God.

But although we may truly be born again Christians and are on our way to heaven, as my pastor friend Troy Keaton put it:

“Conversion does not automatically translate to closeness.

What we need in 2024, a political year, a decade that has been filled with chaos and confusion is simply a mighty army of men and women who know God in an intimate way and are clear about the purposes of God for their life, their families, the church, and this world. Not everyone receives this level of blessing. But it is available to you and me today through Christ.”

Beloved, let us daily lean on the Lord with all humility in prayer and in supportive community with each other. Let’s make space to listen to His word with cultivated and attentive hearts, so that, as confidants of God, we might live for His kingdom and bear the fruit of the Spirit to the honor and glory of King Jesus.