



Ears Up-Part 3

Deafening Trials

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Christian Gerhartsreiter came penniless to the United States from Germany in 1979. He was enamored with American culture, and Mr. **Gerhartsreiter** wanted badly to have his slice of the American dream. Problem was he had no resources; he had no money. And yet, before long, he was hanging out with America's upper crust. He was dining in the finest restaurants, sitting at the best tables. He was rubbing shoulders with all the social and financial elite of our day.

If that sounds familiar to you—perhaps some of you are familiar with his story—it's been written about; it's been on television. He was one of the most notorious con men of our era, as he found that if he just introduced himself as Clark Rockefeller, doors would just kind of fly open for him. People began to treat him like a million bucks. And that was his reality.

"Come on, Mike. You can't fool people just by calling yourself a Rockefeller." Well, he did. And he did it for two decades. He was so good at it, he fooled everyone, including his girlfriend who became his wife. And she later testified it wasn't until their 11th year of marriage that she began to question and suspect that perhaps he's not who he says he is. Think about that—one of the ultimate imposters. He was so good at his con and lived it so well, it was as though he believed it himself.

You know, the Bible says in 2 Timothy 3:13 that in the last days there are going to be evil men and imposters that go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. Of course, Paul wasn't talking about societal con men, but he was talking about spiritual con men.

Now, the evil people we understand, and they're easy to identify—they're the ones throwing rocks at the church. And they're always against what we're saying. In our day, they're writing their blogs and commenting on articles, and it's clear they don't like anything we stand for. They're easy to identify. The problem are the imposters. Those are the ones emblazoned on their jersey the word "Christian." I mean, they're on our team; they're wearing our uniform. They're quoting the Bible; they say they're with us—the imposters.



The worst thing about 2 Timothy 3:13 isn't that the imposters are predicted to be out there in increasing measure, deceiving people—that's bad enough. One of the most eerie things about that text is it includes this phrase that they are deceiving themselves. That's the scary part.

As uncomfortable as that is to think about, the most important thing that we can do—if we're wearing the God jersey and on Christ's team, if we say we're followers of Christ—is to make sure that that moniker that we use to identify ourselves externally is actually an accurate indicator of the reality of our identity. Nothing more important than that.

And that's where the second soil in Jesus's parable about the four soils becomes very helpful for us. If you haven't opened your Bibles yet to turn there, I'd like you to look at this passage—or at least read it off the worksheet that you found in your bulletin. And all we're going to cover is one verse today, because it is Jesus's interpretation of his parable that's supposed to instruct us about a certain kind of person who is, as Paul would describe him, the imposter.

And again, I'd just like us to recognize that maybe we read this text and we say, "Listen, before I start thinking about other people, I just want to read this text, listen to what the Bible has to say, and ask myself the question: is this maybe me?" I don't want it to be me. I want to make sure before the morning is over we all look at this text and say, "That's not me." Very important that we get that out of the text—that may not be as easy as it sounds.

Last week, of course, you might remember we looked at the particular person that was described by the path—the hard, trodden path—the seed, which was the Word of God, in no way could penetrate that. It was obvious he's not with us. Here's, though, soil number two, verse 13. Follow along as I read it for you: "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 they fall away."

Here are people on the rock—which you need to understand, as we've said in the initial reference to the parable, is not rocky ground the way we might think of pebbles or rocks in the dirt. It's that it's a slab of rock, and there is some dirt on top of it. And if you look at it, it looks like dirt. And there's enough dirt there to germinate the seed. And there it goes, and it starts to grow. But there's no room—as it said in the parable, no moisture. In this case, there's no ability to grow a root down in there. And so it grows up pretty quickly, but it dies.



That represents the second kind of person. And the scary thing in the interpretation is they receive what is taught from the truth of Christ—or in our case, from the biblical text—they receive it; they love it; they receive it with joy. But something about having no root—it'd be nice if he had stepped out of the analogy at that point; we'll have to decipher what he meant by that—but we know, whatever that means, we know that in the time of testing, they're done. They walk away. They defect. They're finished.

Time of testing. I'd like to start at the bottom of this verse and just think about that—the time of testing. Because that's not only in this parable, but it's throughout the teaching of Christ, and certainly in the teaching of the apostles, as such a ubiquitous, normal part of Christian living and the church experience. I just want to start by saying we need to expect this. Let's put it this way—number one, if you're taking notes: **we need to expect faith-testing trials.** There are going to be trials, and they're going to test the reality and validity of our faith.

And I use the word “trial,” even though this text just says “a time of testing”—doesn't describe what it is—because both in Matthew and in Mark, which give us a longer explanation of this (Luke is abbreviating this even shorter than it was in Matthew and Mark), two words are added: **persecution** and **tribulation**. And then it adds this phrase, **“on account of the word.”** Because of the association with Christ and the truth of the New Testament gospel, these people encounter something—it's called here a time of testing. But the time of testing is described as tribulation and suffering or persecution—pain. And you've got to make the connection: it's a pain that comes because of an association with Christianity, with the truth of the gospel.

I want to think about that. What does the Bible have to say about what may come my way when I say I'm allied with Christ, I'm on his team, I want to follow Christ? What kind of pain might come into my life in association with that that's connected to that, that would really **test** my faith to see if it's real? That becomes a departure for a lot of people that say, “Well, if that's the case, I'm out of here.”

Let me give you three suggestions from the rest of the Scripture.

Letter A: Personal pain. Personal pain.

And let me describe what I mean by that. It means when your faith—your trust in Christianity—comes in conflict with your feelings. In other words, your feelings are saying one thing, and what you say you believe about Christ says another. And you signed up for this, and you signed up for what you thought



was a loving God who cares for you, who leads you, who provides for you, who makes things better for you. And what you experience is some kind of pain—personal loss. Could be sickness, disease. Could be financial loss. Whatever it is—but it’s painful; it hurts. And “God, if you’re a God who loves me and I’m a child of God because of the forgiveness granted in Christ, then I am in conflict now.”

Pain may be an odd place to go, but once you jot that down, turn with me, if you would, to Deuteronomy 8.

Deuteronomy 8. Let me get you up to speed. I know you know the context, but let me remind you. Deuteronomy—*deuteros* is the word “second”; *nomos* is “law.” It’s the second giving of the law. Why would we need it again? Because there was a generation between Exodus, when the law was first given, and Deuteronomy, where it’s retold; it’s restated.

Here we are after the 40-year wanderings of the Israelites in the desert. And again, if you really need context, they come out of Egypt under Moses. They then are supposed to go to the Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey. They get to the front door—to a city called **Kadesh Barnea**. They send in the 12 spies. Ten come back and say, “The cities are too fortified; their armies are too strong; I’m afraid.” And “Oh, God said he’d give it to us—trust him—but you know, it’s scary.” Two spies, Joshua and Caleb, come back and say, “Well, God said take it. Let’s take it. Let’s do it. We’ll trust God, and we’ll get this thing done.” And the people—did they believe the ten or the two? The ten. They said, “We’re gonna go with those.” The majority of people said, “No, it’s too scary. We don’t trust God.” So God said, “Then you get 40 years in the wilderness, and you get to roam around in the wilderness, and I’ll bring you in after that.” So that’s the promise.

Now we’re at the end of that time—that’s historically. Now God speaks to them in this text. Look at verse 1, Deuteronomy 8:

“The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply and go in and possess the land that the Lord swore to give your fathers.”

Now remember this: if you’re 10 years old at Kadesh Barnea and you’re watching your older brothers and your uncles and aunts and your father go in there and say, “We can’t take this land,” you’re now 50



years old and you're about to go into the land. And this is looking back on all that time. And he says, "You gotta be careful—baby—do what I say. Keep the commandment."

Verse 2:

"And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness,"

Now here comes the purpose clause—and this may be surprising. Why did he do that? If I were to ask you the question, "Why did they wander in the wilderness?" I hope any third-grader in our church would say, "Because they disobeyed God. They didn't listen to his command; they didn't go in and take the Promised Land. The 12 spies—shouldn't have listened to those ten—should have listened to Joshua and Caleb." But the purpose clause here is different.

Because if you think about it, when God's got a problem with a group of people—clearly, even in the book of Exodus and the book of Numbers—he can deal with it immediately. In Korah's rebellion, what happened? God said, "You're done." They're done. God could have taken everyone that did not believe him at Kadesh Barnea and said, "You can't go." He could have had them enslaved in Egypt; he could have opened up the ground and swallowed them up. He could have done whatever he wanted to do. But instead he said, "Fine, you're going to go into the desert for 40 years." Now why that circuitous path to get to the Promised Land?

Here's the answer:

"that he might humble you, **testing** you"—that'd be a good phrase to highlight—"testing you, to know what was in your heart."

And never forget this about God—from Genesis to Revelation, one of the cornerstones of his attributes is he's all-knowing; he's omniscient. Clearly, he knows what's in everybody's heart. Even Jesus, the incarnate Christ, in his humbled state, looks at people, and this text often describes he knows exactly what they're thinking. So God knows. This is so it can be revealed. It's so that people can see and that



we can see. And he wanted these people to make it very clear—to see what’s in their heart in the time of testing, whether you would keep his commandments or not.

Verse 3:

“And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with **manna**”—now *manna*, we’re used to, if you’ve been in the church. It’s not, you know, well translated—just a weird word. It really means “What is it?”—“which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

Now think that through and understand what he’s saying. See, if I’m in the desert, I’m thinking, “Get me to the Promised Land where there’s fertile ground; I can sow my barley and my wheat; I can raise it up; I can harvest it; we can make it into bread; we can have our food. We need those things.” And God says, “You don’t need those things. All you need is for me to say that you’re going to live today, and I can make you live. If I want cornflakes to appear on your lawn for your food for the day, I can do it. If I want quail to fall out of the sky, I can do it.” And that’s what he did to prove to them what? Really, all you need is to be right with God. God can take care of everything. “Trust me, trust me, trust me. Man doesn’t live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. If God wants you to live, you’ll live. If he wants you to eat, you’ll eat. You don’t have to have all the provisions everybody thinks you have to have.”

Verse 4:

“Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years.”

“Oh, yeah, I never noticed that. You’re right. Your feet didn’t swell those 40 years.”

Verse 5:

“Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you.”



Now, you could say real quickly—thinking of that word, thinking of it narrowly—“Well, yeah, he does. He disciplined them, as in punished them, by sending them into the wilderness for 40 years.” But that Hebrew word’s much broader than just “spanked them,” gave them some kind of punishment for their sin. That’s the word that can be translated **training**, or it’s like a dad who’s the Pop Warner coach of his kid. He’s gonna make him do some things and go through some difficulties to get him ready to face the battle on the gridiron. There’s training involved. And just like a father might get his son ready to face some things and discipline him and train him, so the Lord your God disciplines you.

“You made me spend all these early years of my life growing up in the desert so that I could be trained.” Trained to do what?

Verse 6:

“So you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him.”

Like, “If ever I say, ‘Go take that city,’ and you say, ‘Oh, it’s really big. The armies are big. It’s really a fortified city,’ that you’ll obey me.” Fearing him more than you fear the armies of the fortified cities.

Verse 7:

“For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out of the valleys and hills.”

He says elsewhere, a land flowing with milk and honey—it’s such a fertile, perfect place for you to live.



“Now, if that’s the case, why didn’t you just get us there right now?” Because, like a father disciplines his son, I’m disciplining you—to put it in the words of verse 2, **testing you**, to see what’s in your heart, so that you’ll trust me.

See, the wilderness wandering—just to get a bit poetic here—is a picture of the dry times we go through of personal pain. And in that trial he is **testing** whether or not we believe him, trust him, and are willing to obey him even when our feelings are in conflict with our faith.

That’s what it’s like. It’s a lot like David, who was anointed by Samuel and said, “You’re going to be the king.” Now, he could have rolled out, like that commercial, a green arrow on the ground or a red carpet, and put it right up the steps into the bēma of the middle of the throne room in Jerusalem and taken over Saul’s place. But he didn’t do that. He gave him over a decade of running as a fugitive, to where later he would write words like this: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you’re with me. Your rod and your staff”—those are painful items if you’re a lamb and your shepherd has those items; if you get off the path, he starts slapping the side of your shoulder and you feel the sting of pain—“they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”

See, what David was praying for: he wouldn’t have those enemies. “God, vanquish my enemies.” But he said, “No, I’m going to provide for you **in the midst** of your enemies. I’m going to guide you through the valley of the shadow of death so that you can learn to hold on to my hand and trust me through the hard times.”

See, the imposter hits those hard times and they’re done with God. Real faith hangs on. Real faith says, “I’ll trust you even though my feelings are in conflict with my faith right now. I’ll recognize that part of the wilderness experience of my personal pain is to get me into the Promised Land—into the place where I recognize I’ll obey God even in the good times.” Because when the barley was being harvested and the wheat was being pounded into **dough** and into bread and everyone was eating, they might—as God often said in the Pentateuch—forget him. “Don’t you know that you live not because you have a farm, not because you have a harvest, but because every word that comes out of my mouth sustains your life? Trust me.” Personal pain—the reason for the wilderness wanderings. Part of the reason David had to go trek through the Philistine desert—so that he could learn to trust God even in the good times.

There’s another kind of pain that doesn’t sound quite so poignant, but it is very pointed. Let me call it this—**Letter B: Doctrinal pain**. Doctrinal pain.



What I mean by that—doctrinal pain—is when my faith comes in conflict with my assumptions about God. My faith comes in conflict, painful conflict, with my assumptions about God. Now think this through. As you’re thinking about it, turn to John 6.

Here’s a situation much like we all experience, because I would say most of you became Christians—if you’re here today saying, “I’m a follower of Christ”—you became a Christian **before** you read the entire Bible. Didn’t even read the whole Book. And you said, “I hear the gospel; I hear the offer—‘forgiveness.’ I see that Christ has paid the penalty. I’m going to repent of my sins, trust in him, and have my sins forgiven.” And you became a Christian—you didn’t even know what was in the Book.

Here’s the assumption: we read John 3:16, and we go, “Well, that’s great; I’m ready for verse 17.” “Oh, I don’t like 17 as much.” “Oh, 18’s even worse.” “Hmm. I don’t even want to read to the end of this chapter.” What happened? You assumed that if God is a loving God that forgives my sin and is my Father, and I’m an adopted child, I expect **this, this, and this** about God. And your mind was rocked when you start reading the Old Testament, and you say, “Well, God is much more severe, much more stern. He exercises much more severe and unyielding justice than I thought he would.” Look at the end of the Book—the book of Revelation—“You mean that’s what you have planned for this world?”

Your doctrinal pain will be when you hear something and read something in your Bibles—or you hear your preacher preach something, and you check it out like a good Berean, and you say, “Wow, **that is** what the Bible says. I don’t like it.” “You know, if I were writing the Bible, I wouldn’t have that in it. If I were coming up with a view of God, it wouldn’t be *that*.” That’s another crossroads for people.

John 6—drop all the way down near the end of this chapter. Let’s start in verse 57. If you know anything about the Gospel of John, John is pulling things out of Christ’s ministry that are focused on the analogies: the analogy of “I’m light—I am the light of the world”; “I’m the gate—you go in and out through me”; “I am the vine; you’re the branch—abide in me.” Well, here’s one about ingesting Christ—another analogy. And the idea is, as he has in mind and later explains, the idea of his own death on a cross—you need to be so alive and associated with that, it’s like you ingest me; it’s like you eat bread.

Verse 57:



"As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me."

Verse 58:

"This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the manna the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

Now, here's something that's clear: we're not talking about physical death, because every Christian has physically died in former generations. And we're not talking about literal eating. Clearly that's not the case, because the manna was physically eaten, and they physically died. This is some kind of life that I grant—that I'm granted because of my alliance with Christ—that is so intimate and so full and so complete, it's like ingesting food. "Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

Verse 59:

"Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught in **Capernaum**."

I mean, this is supposed to put the focus on God, and he's saying you've got to be so associated with me, it's like you're eating me—eating my body.

Verse 60:

"When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?'"



"I like the other stuff about, you know, 'Blessed are the meek, [they] shall inherit the earth.' But this? A hard saying. Who can listen to this?"

Verse 61:

"But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, 'Do you take offense at this?'"

"Have I just kind of rocked your doctrinal sensibilities? Are you having doctrinal pain right now in your mind? Hmm."

Verse 62:

"Then what if you were to see the Son of Man"—there's the phrase from Daniel (and Daniel 7, but)—"ascending to where he was before?"

"Well, I could show you things and rock your doctrinal world like you cannot believe. What if you saw more of the truth that I've yet to even reveal to you?"

Verse 63:

"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no help at all."

Now, that's his moniker for the idea of our lives being so focused on the here and now. Remember when Jesus said to Peter, "You've got your mind set on the things of man; your mind's not set on the things of God"? Why was that? Because Peter was saying, "You're never going to go to the cross and be crucified. I heard you say it, but I'm not for that, and you're going to stop talking that way." "Get behind me, Satan," he says. "You're thinking about things with your human assumptions about what



God should and should not do.” Those are of no help at all—your assumptions. It’s the Spirit. It’s what he has said—he knows what’s right. “And these things that I just said about me—totally right.”

“The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

Verse 64:

“But there are some of you who do not believe.”

Now there’s the test. Now, how are they described earlier? His **disciples**—that’s the description, verse 61. They’re disciples, and you’re saying they don’t believe—**currently**. “Aren’t you going to say that they’re going to stop believing?” Because that’s what the parable sounded like: “They believe for a while, and then they fall away.” Whatever that belief is, it’s not the kind of belief that James tries to tease out between saving faith and dead faith—they’re not the same. Faith without works is dead. There’s something about this faith that he’s saying, “You don’t have that kind of faith.”

“For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him”—the ultimate imposter, Judas. Looked like a disciple, talked like a disciple, acted like—probably maybe like Gerhartsreiter—maybe he even thought he was a disciple. But Judas wasn’t; he didn’t believe saving faith.

Verse 65:

“And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.””

Verse 66—highlight this verse:

“After this many of his disciples **turned back and no longer walked with him.**”



You want a historical expansion of the simple phrase, “In a time of testing, they fell away”? Here it is. What kind of pain is this? **Doctrinal pain** is what I call it. It’s when my assumptions about God—what he should do and what he should say and what he should be like—come in conflict with my faith in the God of the Bible. I’ve got to make a decision: stick with it or fall away; submit my assumptions to the Spirit’s teaching, clearly in the Word, or do like these folks in verse 66—say, “I’m done with this.”

I hate to end it there, so let’s read a couple more verses, because here’s the right response.

Verse 67:

“So Jesus said to the Twelve, ‘Do you want to go away as well?’”

Verse 68:

“Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.’”

“And even if you say things that we can’t compute—even if you say things that we think, ‘That’s crazy; I would never think that’—we got nowhere else to go.” In the spirit of Francis Schaeffer, let me just say it this way: if there **is** a God and he has spoken to us in the propositional truth of the Scripture, what are we going to do—rewrite it? Cherry-pick it? Potpourri the Bible? I can’t. I’ve got to take it, and I’ve got to say, if this is the God of the Bible, rightly interpreted, then there it is. I submit my assumptions about what I want God to be to the God who **is**—to use Francis Schaeffer’s words.

You can’t reconcile your faith with your assumptions—I call it doctrinal pain. That’s an off-ramp for a lot of people. Physical pain—you know that’s an off-ramp for a lot of people.

And perhaps the first thing you noticed as a Christian, in terms of pain, was the third kind I want to talk about. Let’s give it this heading—**Letter C: Relational pain**. Relational pain.



You know that your commitment to follow Christ caused relational problems, don't you? Your faith in Christ caused some kind of pain with your family and your friends. And if it hasn't yet, then you're a brand-new Christian. It will.

We don't need to expand on this very much because we've already taught about it in Luke. Luke 6—when he gave those statements of blessings and woes—he said, “Blessed are you when people revile you, hate you, exclude you, and say all kinds of evil about you because of me.” He said that's going to be the norm. They do that to anyone who's rightly related—who has real faith and is not an imposter. That's what they did to the real prophets.

But “Woe to you”—remember the next line?—“when all men speak well of you,” when it never affects your relationships. Let me just say that real clearly: if all your buddies, after you became a Christian, say, “Well, that's cool; you're a Christian now. Cool. Okay, that's awesome,” then you surely haven't explained much about your Christianity. “Woe to you when all men speak well of you.” Why? Because that's how they spoke about the imposters—“so your fathers said about the false prophets.”

Relational pain. I don't need to say much about this, except for maybe if you're taking notes you can jot these two references down: **Hebrews 11:17–19**—and then in parentheses you might want to put **Genesis 22**. Because Hebrews 11:17–19 is the New Testament commentary on Genesis 22. And it says it this way: that this is when Abraham was **tested** and told to offer up his son Isaac on an altar. You want to talk about the ultimate test of loyalty between relationship and God? There it is.

And I know—especially the blasphemous words coming from the pulpit in South Orange County—whenever I talk about God coming before your children. I mean, I know this is not a very hearty context, culturally or historically, for those statements. But that's the picture in Genesis 22—when your belief and faith and trust in the clear teaching of Scripture comes in conflict with a relationship in your life. God makes this clear in passage after passage—you better have your priorities straight. And Abraham passed that test, saying, “You know what, I don't understand this. It's causing a lot of issues here.” But he considered that God was even able to raise him from the dead. What's that mean? “I don't know, God. In the end, I know I gotta be faithful to you. Even though I can't understand it, I'm going to trust you're going to work this out.” It's a wild and sobering text.



We're going to look at another one pretty soon. I don't know if you have Luke open, but Luke 8:19–21—the conflict that Jesus is having here with his family where they're saying, “Come on, we want to talk to you—come outside.” Jesus's response in verse 21—we'll spend a whole week on this—but it says in verse 21, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.” He was saying that in contrast to his mom outside saying, “You've got to stop teaching. Come on, outside.” I hope it wasn't Mother's Day. I mean, how offensive is this? Mom saying, “Come on, I gotta talk to you, Jesus,” and he says, “You know what? My mother is the one who hears the word of God and does it.”

“Dude, what are you saying?” I'm saying when it comes to loyalty to God and his agenda, my faith in that supersedes any devotion or loyalty to any human relationship.

And you know what? I don't have to preach about this, right? You know this—when you're in conflict. Because if your Christianity is relational, tension, pain—that's when a lot of people say, “You know what, I'll take my kids over Christ; I'll take my family over—I'll take my friends at work over—Christ.” And off they go—immediately, in the time of testing, they fall away.

Now, the scary thing about all of this is that Luke 8:13 begins with this: **they receive the word joyfully**. I don't want to make too much about the word, but maybe you've been around enough to know that certain times Greek words are translated into English words—same English words—but they're different and they carry a little different weight, a little different flavour. The typical word that translates “receive,” what you would expect here, is the word **lambanō** in Greek—*lambanō*. *Lambanō* usually translates as just “receive.” It's your common word for “receive”; it's most frequently used.

This is the word *dechomai*—which, if you've been around in my teaching, you've heard me call attention to the word *dechomai*. It's a word that's a little bit different. It translates the same English word “receive,” but it has a bit of a flavor to it and an intensity to it—like when Paul describes the Thessalonians in **1 Thessalonians 2:13**, talking about the reception of the word, and it was so hearty. They received the word—they *dechomai*-ed the word—with such enthusiasm, as the words of God and not the words of man. Talk about a reverent, joyful reception of the message.

And I often point out, when I talk about the verb *dechomai*, that in Luke 2, Mary and Joseph bring the baby Jesus to the Temple Mount, and Simeon is there, and the word *dechomai* is used when it says, “And he took up the baby in his arms.” Now, I don't know—if you're Simeon, you know that passage, and you're waiting for the coming of the Messiah, and all of a sudden now you get to meet the Messiah as a baby, and you take him—and I'm thinking, “I don't want to hold the baby”? He takes that up with



reverence and joy. Imagine the connection—the emotions of Simeon picking up that baby. There's the idea.

I preach to a lot of people, but when someone out there takes the preaching of the Word of God, particularly the gospel, and receives it like, "Ah, that is so great. It's amazing," I think, "Wow, great conversion. What an amazing Christian. That's a great start to the Christian life." That's **how these people started**. "The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy."

Now, if you're in the middle of that test and you're about to bail out, you may say, "Well, look back—I've got a great story here. I've got a great experience. When I started the Christian life five years ago, 15 years ago—I mean, you should have seen the enthusiasm and the joy and the way it changed—it was so exciting; I was so into it." Of course, I'm saying, "I may have just bailed off the ship and departed and defected, but—I don't know—let's call it something else. But let's not say I'm a phony, an imposter."

I guess the principle I'd like to throw out there—as scandalous as it may sound—number two in your outline: **you need to never trust in past experiences**. Just don't. These guys could have trusted in past experiences, but in the time of testing it was proved that their faith was not real—even though they had a great story about becoming a Christian, quote-unquote.

Weddings remind me of this. There's this great reception of a spouse. There are always these words at the wedding: "Do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife?" And every time I've been to a wedding, they say, "Yes. I take her." "Do you take this man to be your lawfully—" "I love that guy; I take him." A great, joyful reception.

Let me give you some names of people that have had that experience of joyful reception: Charlie Sheen, Britney Spears, Nicolas Cage, Jim Carrey—three older folks, Mickey Rooney, Patty Duke, Renée Zellweger, Kim Kardashian. You know what all these people have in common? They had wonderfully exciting weddings of receiving their new spouse—and the wedding didn't even last, or the marriage didn't even last, a year. Less than a year.

Now, did they receive with joy? Oh, they received their spouse with joy—a lot more joy than your wedding, because they had a lot more money to spend on flowers than you did. You want to talk about



the reception of that spouse that day? “Ooh, do I ever take you to be my wife.” Didn’t even last a tax season, some of these marriages. Think about this. And they were done.

Now, when you were there sitting in the audience, can you tell? Hard to tell—because you can’t see the invisible. And the invisible is the quality of their love and the sincerity of their vows. You can’t see that—because the time of testing is going to come in any marriage. (Don’t say “amen” to that at this point— not helpful.) But you know that, right? The time of testing comes. It seems for the Hollywood elite, it comes in, you know, the matter of hours—it seems to come. But for all of us, it comes, and the question is: fall away, or hang in there? The quality of love and the sincerity of the vows—and I know I’m speaking in human terms at this point in the sermon; I get that—but this is how Jesus is describing the situation. People are joyfully receiving Christ, and then—testing—and “I’m done with this.”

The spiritual wedding, if you will, of someone that becomes a Christian and hangs in there until the coming of Christ, and those that seem to be Christians and bail out in five months or five years—they look the same.

Let me show you that passage I quoted. Let me just turn you there real quick—**1 Thessalonians 2:13**. I want to show you that this one verse, with the exception of the last phrase, can be used of both imposters and real Christians. And I don’t want to create people that are so skeptical. Paul is rejoicing in the reception—the *dechomai* reception—of the word. Joyful reception. Look at how he puts it—again, I’ve quoted it, but let’s read it:

Verse 13, 1 Thessalonians 2:13:

“And we also thank God constantly for this”—do you think he’s excited? Constantly we’re thanking God—“that when you *dechomai*-ed the word, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God...”

Now stop right there. You could say that about the second soil and about the fourth soil—they look the same. The difference is the last phrase:

“...which is at work in you believers.”



There's something about the internalization of the Spirit's work at conversion in a Christian that becomes like this power plant of faith that then, when it hits the test, it passes the test.

Was there a test for the Thessalonians? Verse 14:

"For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews."

We understand that—you went through the trial. And how did they do? Skip ahead to chapter 3, verse 1.

1 Thessalonians 3:1:

"Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions."

That's the **opposite** of what we're reading about in Luke 8:13. They were moved by afflictions; the time of testing came and they were gone. Paul says, "I sent Timothy because I want you to stay firm."

"For you yourselves know that we are **destined** for this."

That's another one that's never on the DaySpring card—suffering. "You were **destined** for this." No, that's not—it's never a best-selling book title. But that's what the Bible says, and that's why I worded the first point that way: **expect faith-testing trials**.



Verse 4:

"For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know."

Verse 5:

"For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your"—there's the word—"faith"—he wanted to know what kind of faith it was: saving faith, temporal faith—"for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain."

Now, let me pose this as the theory here: the tempter—though he's prominent in Jesus's explanation of the first soil, coming in, sweeping away and taking the word—the tempter is also involved in the second soil, though Jesus doesn't mention it. Paul's mentioning it here. And I think it's a look back, not at the attack—because when the Word of God and faith and all of that is at work in you, you succeed; you pass the test—but Satan is involved in the **reception** of the word and how that's done. More on that in a second. That's the idea of the kind of reception that's not biblical reception.

And let that lead into us trying to interpret that phrase "had no root."

Let's get to the middle of this verse now—Luke 8:13. He describes the problem—the diagnosis: **they didn't have any root.**

What are we talking about? Now again, if we were all agrarian farmers of the first century, we would have the picture of a soil that was able to spring up a plant but not sustain fruit. And if you use the word "rock," singular, the idea is that you have this slab underneath and some dirt gets put on top of it—enough to sprout up a plant—but it is—here's the good word—**shallow**.

There's a kind of reception of the truth that is shallow. It's not complete. It's surface. It's a surface response. It's shallow hearing. It's partial hearing. It's not complete hearing.



Let me put it this way—as strange as this may sound—number three on your outline: **we need to carefully hear the whole gospel**. There's the key—the **whole** gospel.

Now think this through—again, we're talking in human terms; I understand salvation is a God-action. But when we describe it in human terms, there's something about those who hear the word without Satan's interference—and God conquers this thing—and they hear the whole thing. Let's call it premarital counseling, if you will. And then there are those that only hear what they want to hear. They respond to the gospel, but they're only responding to the part they want to hear.

It's like those weddings I just described. They were very, very flamboyant, I'm sure, with the reception of a spouse. And there were words by some preacher—or some stand-in preacher—that stood up there and said something that was akin to the Common Book of Prayer from the 16th century that goes something like this: “For richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health; for better, for worse; till death do us part.” Those words, in some form, were in all those weddings I just described to you—I'm sure they were. That's what weddings are all about. It's a covenant commitment to love in good times and bad.

But there were a lot of other words, too, like, “You complete me,” “You make me so happy,” “You fulfill me,” “You're my sunshine,” “I love you,” “I feel so much in my heart for you.” Everybody I listed there—and millions more—that's the part they hear: “You're my sunshine.” And then the sun sets. “You complete me.” Now you annoy me. And now the whole part in the sermon by the preacher about “sickness/health, richer/poor, better/worse, till death do us part”—I don't even hear that part. “You're not making me happy anymore. You don't thrill me like you used to.”

Now, what's the difference between the sincerity of love and the reality of the commitment and the vow in one marriage that goes 50 years and one that goes 50 days? What's the difference? All the same words were there. It's the response of the participants in what they **heard**—what they chose to hear. I'm speaking in human terms—I understand that. But when I'm talking to you to see, “Are you real or are you not? Are you an imposter or is your faith real?”—you've got to look back at this reality of you hearing the gospel and saying, “Did I know what I was signing up for? Did I have premarital counseling?”

What does that mean? Well, good premarital counseling says, “You know what? The ‘You complete me’ stuff won't feel that way after a while. And you're going to feel different feelings, and there will be some annoyance, and there will be problems, and there will be threats. There will come a time of



testing for your love. Are you going to be married when that's over?" That's the question. That's good premarital counseling.

Jesus did that all the time. Moderns rarely do it. And maybe your pastor never did it, or the person that brought you the message of Christ and the gospel—maybe they never mentioned it. Christ did it all the time.

We're in Luke—go to Luke 9:57–62. Let me show you one example of this.

Verse 57—Jesus warns about feelings and assumptions and friends and family. You want to talk about all the things that test our faith—he's bringing those all up front like a good premarital counselor.

Luke 9:57:

"As they were going along the road, someone said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.'"

"You complete me, Jesus—you see that? Love you, man. I want to be on your team. I'll follow you wherever you go." You can hear the string quartet in the background. "I feel it."

Jesus, of course, being omniscient, can look right past those words and respond to the real issue. "How about 'for better, for worse; in sickness and in health; richer or poorer; till death do us part'? Is that what you mean?"

Verse 58:

"And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'"



"I can't promise you a house and the creature comforts that I think probably are there in your assumption"—and for Christ, he knew they were there.

Verse 59:

"To another he said, 'Follow me.' But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.'"

And Jesus said, "No problem; I love you; I'll wait for you"? Verse 60:

"And Jesus said to him, 'Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.'"

"When the Lord says 'now,' it's now." Sometimes my calling and my demands in your life—and your faith in me—it's going to conflict with your relationships.

Verse 61:

"Yet another said, 'I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.'"

Verse 62:

"Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'"



Some of you, perhaps like me, grew up in a church where you had the preacher, at the end of the sermon—it was always the same ending—where we ended with, “Who wants to be on Christ’s team? Say ‘yes’ to Jesus.” And the organist would play, and if no one came forward, she’d play again and put it in a minor key, and maybe someone would come. And then eventually someone comes down the aisle. And, of course, it’s always this joyful reception. And some of you are like, “I’m glad—finally we can go home.” But this idea of someone coming—it was always the same: embraced by the pastor—“Oh, that’s awesome.”

Never mind seeing someone have this kind of dialogue at the front: “Come down and have some dialogue and get back in your seat, man. Ready for this?” You never see that. You see a pastor ever send somebody back to a seat? I’ve never seen that. Now, I understand the preacher is not Christ and doesn’t have the, you know, x-ray vision into their assumptions and their relationship with their family and all that. But where’s the **premarital counseling** when it comes to say “Yes” to Jesus? Jesus called it **counting the cost**. We’re going to get into this big time in Luke 14—an amazing passage on saying, “Wait a minute—think this through.”

Let me close with this passage. I know I’m running late—I’ll close with this—**1 Peter 1**. I’d like you to look at it, though, if you would—1 Peter 1. End with a positive note—what it looks like to **pass the test**. You’re going to have faith-testing trials. Looking back because you had some great experience with Christ in the past does not necessarily mean you’ve got saving faith. You’ve got to carefully hear the whole message of the gospel and be ready for that. And when you are, it looks like this.

Verse 3—Peter starts with this great word of praise:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be **born again** to a **living hope** through the **resurrection** of Jesus Christ from the dead...”

Our hope—a future hope rooted in the finished work of Christ, and the validation of the resurrection (the bodily resurrection of Christ)—gives us now a hope in what?

Verse 4:

“...to an **inheritance** that is **imperishable, undefiled, and unfading**, kept in heaven for you,”



“It’s coming—it’s there.”

Verse 5:

“who by God’s power are being **guarded through faith** for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Verse 6:

“In this you rejoice...”

That demonstrative pronoun—you’ve got to send it back to the antecedent; and the antecedent here is what? What am I rejoicing in? This **inheritance**, rooted in the finished work of Christ, coming in the end. “I’m sure it’s going to be here. God promised it. He’s kept it for me.” That’s the thing you rejoice in—

“though now for a little while, if necessary”—and it’s going to be—“you have been grieved by various trials,”

That sounds bad. It does. It sounds like the valley of the shadow of death. It sounds like the wilderness wanderings.

Verse 7:

“so that the **tested genuineness** of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in **praise and glory and honor** at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”



The crucible of all of those painful situations—relationships, doctrinal stress and pain, personal pain—much like gold. And it's precious, I get that, but no precious metal is as precious as your faith. And even gold is purified and proved by the testing of fire; your faith is proved by the testing of these painful situations. And in the end, if it's real faith, it's found to result in praise and glory and honor—**when**? When Christ comes back—at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Verse 8:

"Though you have not seen him, you **love** him. Though you do not now see him, you **believe** in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,"

Same word—**faith**. You have faith in him, and you rejoice—

Verse 9:

"obtaining the outcome of your **faith**, the **salvation** of your souls."

Real faith is saving faith. It's the kind of faith that, when the trials and griefs hit, has that tempered sense of joy—doesn't take the off-ramp and say, "I'm done with this."

Christian Gerhartsreiter—of course, we only can tell his story because he was caught. His wife started the suspicion 11 years into their marriage, and it unraveled. And some of you have heard his story or seen his biography. And he's in big trouble—this con man— all kinds of crimes. He was tried in a Southern California court and sentenced to prison. He's now in the **Ironwood State Prison**—which, if you don't know your prison system very well, that made me smile because—you know where that is? It's in **Blythe**. If you're visiting, that's an inside joke. So this morning he's probably shuffling in for lunch right now—Mr. Gerhartsreiter out there, in **Blythe**, incarcerated. I'm sure some of the fellow inmates probably joke, "Here goes Rockefeller. He's got kitchen duty today."

Rockefellers in California—well, there are some. There's one that frequents California—**Justin Rockefeller**, fifth-generation Rockefeller. One of his ventures is this financial software company out in Mountain View. He flies into the Bay Area, does his business, introduces himself as Mr. Rockefeller—doors open, people treat him like a million bucks. And I'm telling you—worth a million bucks? Way



more than a million bucks. He's one of the trustees of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund that represents **\$100 billion**. Did you hear that right? \$100 billion in that fund. He eats at the nicest restaurants, sits at the best tables; people open doors for him: "Yes, sir, Mr. Rockefeller."

The other "Rockefeller" is in prison in Blythe right now. The difference, of course, is that one truly **is** a Rockefeller. You could swab his mouth and do a little DNA testing and find out he's the descendant of John D. Rockefeller. He's a Rockefeller—and all that money he acts like he has? He **has** all that money. He's super, filthy, stinking rich. People treated Mr. Gerhartsreiter that way for a long time, but it was all a sham.

I know some people come to church on Father's Day weekend and want some feel-good Father's Day message, and I'm sorry, I didn't provide all that for you. But please know my heart for you is that, as we continue to teach through this text, I want you to know that I care about you enough to say: **take a look at your life**. Search yourself. Try yourself. **Test yourself** to see if you're in the faith—the real faith.

For all the irritation and all the grief I get for preaching sermons like this—for those that have tested themselves to find out they're frauds and phonies—I guarantee you, on Judgment Day, they'll be very glad to see me. "Thanks, Pastor Mike. I appreciate that."

The sad news for Mr. Gerhartsreiter out in Blythe is—no matter how much he wants to be a Rockefeller—he can never be one. The good news is: if you hear a sermon like this and you feel convicted, and you think, "Oh, I'm not a real Christian," the great news is—you can become one **right now**, at this moment. There are no cards to fill out. There are no hands raised. There are no aisles to walk. As I said at childhood occasions this morning, this is a decision between **you and God**. You do business with God as God grants you the ability to repent and put your trust in him.

And if you **do** have assurance that you're really a Christian—that the moniker emblazoned on your jersey is really representative of your true identity—then let's praise God for that. Because you've seen in your life that tempered joy and rejoicing in a God you can't see—because your faith is real. That's a good—I mean, driving home, out to your lunch, or whatever you're doing—that's a good feeling. I pray that's the end result for most of you. And for the rest, I pray it'd be a day of decision for you.



Let's pray together. Why don't you stand—I'll let you go. I've gone long; I'm sorry. Let's pray.

“God, I do love this church. I love these people. Of course, I love your Word the most. And I want the truth of your Word, as it's penetrated and convicted my own heart. After at least ten years in my life being a fraud and a phony and an imposter, I know what it's like to claim Christ and to wear the Christian jersey and not really be converted. Many people in this room could testify to that. If it's past and part of our testimony, that's great—I mean, it's sad, but it's good that it's in the past. It's for those currently doing that that we're concerned about the most.

“So, God, we pray for your Spirit to work in our midst. Convict us, as you promised the Spirit was sent to do, of sin, righteousness, and judgment. And allow us to have that endowed grace that you give to open our eyes and unstop our ears so that we wouldn't have shallow hearing and temporal responses and this kind of mental assent to the things we want to hear about Christ, but we'd hear the **whole** message and respond wholeheartedly to it.

“And, God, for those that have—give them great joy this afternoon, I pray, knowing that we're your children. And though we can't 'spend it all now,' so to speak, our inheritance is waiting for us—reserved, kept, undefiled, can't be touched, it's guarded—guarded by the power of God. We look forward to that one day, and may our faith result in praise, glory, and honor when Christ is revealed.

“In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.”