

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

Warning to Unfaithful Leaders
Jeremiah 22:1-5, 13-17; 23:9-18

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a series of sessions needs to have access to the "Introduction" article found at the beginning of each series (Bible Teaching #....). The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader:

Bible Study Leader:

Have additional Bibles available.

Have a dictionary ready for the children and for the youth application time.

Have a white board or large piece of paper available with markers for the youth to use during their application time activity.

Ask someone to read Jeremiah 23: 9-14 and another person read Jeremiah 23: 15-18.

These are dramatic passages and it would be well to assign them ahead of the class time so they can be read effectively.

Worship Time Leader:

Have a Scripture reader prepared before time.

Music Sources:

The Servant Song, *The Worship Hymnal* # 384; CCLI #72673

A Charge to Keep I Have, *The Worship Hymnal* #596; CCLI #118850

Let It Be Said of Us, *The Worship Hymnal* #597; CCLI #1855882

Find Us Faithful, *The Worship Hymnal* 598; CCLI #18259

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)***Warning to Unfaithful Leaders*****Focal Text**

Jeremiah 22:1-5, 13-17; 23:9-18

Background

Jeremiah 22:1—23:40

Main Idea

Leaders are accountable to God for giving leadership in accord with God's instructions.

Question to Explore

How faithful are you to the responsibilities God has given you?

Teaching Aim

To lead the church to identify implications of God's standards for faithful leaders.

Gathering together:

Sing one or both of the following:

The Servant Song, *The Worship Hymnal* # 384; CCLI #72673

A Charge to Keep I Have, *The Worship Hymnal* #596; CCLI #118850

Opening prayer: Thank you Lord for another day in which to gather for Bible study. Open our ears and hearts to the truths in Your Word. Give us courage to stand firm in commitment to share the Gospel faithfully with others this coming week. Amen.

First thoughts:**Unfaithful Shepherds**

Jeremiah 23:1-2

Woe to the leaders who destroy and scatter the flock. This illustration of shepherds is 180 degrees from what shepherds or leaders are to be and do. The indictment is this:

“you scattered” and you “have not bestowed care”. Sheep by nature need great care. God’s people whom the sheep represent need great spiritual care.

There are consequences for being an unfaithful leader. No one is able to lead God’s people astray and not be held accountable. God “will bestow punishment”.

The great example of what shepherds are to do is the 23rd Psalm. The shepherd, the leader, is to guide, protect, and provide for the flock.

Anyone thinking about becoming a leader of this group or any other must carefully weigh this. It is not a decision to be taken lightly by one being sought as a leader and those who are responsible for choosing a leader.

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly (James 3:1) James was not trying to discourage teachers, but to impress on them the importance of their task. In home church, many will have an opportunity to lead a Bible Study or Worship Time. It is a serious responsibility but another scripture brings encouragement ***I can do everything through him who gives me strength*** (Philippians 4:13). We are not to avoid the responsibility of teaching, but we are to do everything we do through him who gives us strength.

Closing the Gathering Time:

Pray for guidance that God will raise up leaders among you that are faithful to Him.

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won’t need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

Warning to Unfaithful Leaders

Focal Text

Jeremiah 22:1-5, 13-17; 23:9-18

Background

Jeremiah 22:1—23:40

Main Idea

Leaders are accountable to God for giving leadership in accord with God's instructions.

Question to Explore

How faithful are you to the responsibilities God has given you?

Teaching Aim

To lead the church to identify implications of God's standards for faithful leaders.

Introduction to your personal study:

“Chapter 22 is a collection of messages that had been proclaimed by the prophet on previous occasions. Following a general message to the Davidic dynasty (22:1-9), it contains a message to Shallum (22:10-12), Jehoiakim (22:13-19), Jerusalem (22:20-23) and Jehoiachin (22:24-30). The message may have been collected to serve as a reminder that all the kings prior to Zedekiah had been warned of the impending punishment of the nation.”¹

Over and over the warning went out from Jeremiah to the kings. If it had been heeded it would have changed the history of Judah. The wrath and punishment of God would not have fallen upon them if they had only listened.

¹ F.B. Huey, Jr., *The New American Commentary, Jeremiah/Lamentations*, Broadman Press, 1993, pg. 203.

This is a message that can be and should be proclaimed to every generation. Turn to God and be blessed.

The passages in chapter 23 are directed toward false prophets. It broke Jeremiah's heart that they continued to listen to them rather than the Word of God.

Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Introduction**” article found at the beginning of this series (Bible Teaching #....) of Bible Study and Worship sessions. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you, as well.

Focusing on the Meaning:

I. A Warning to Judah (Jeremiah 22:1-5).

Jeremiah 22:1-5

This is what the Lord says: “Go down to the palace of the king of Judah and proclaim this message: 2 ‘Hear the word of the Lord to you, king of Judah, you who sit on David’s throne---you, your officials, and your people who come through these gates. 3 This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the stranger, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place. 4 For if you are careful to carry out these commands, then kings who sit on David’s throne will come through the gates of this palace, riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by their officials and their people. 5 But if you do not obey these commands, declares the Lord, I swear by myself that this palace will become a ruin.”

Once again Jeremiah is called upon to proclaim “what the Lord says”. This phrase pervades all of the book of Jeremiah. It is vitally important that each of us understand that the word of the Lord is paramount and should be taken seriously by all.

Jeremiah may have been at the Temple when he was instructed to “Go down” to the palace. He was to stand at the palace gate where he could speak to everyone going in to the palace.

In these verses God warns all of Judah - from the king who most believe was Jehoiakim (609-598) his officials, right down to the common people. The warning here is like the warnings throughout the book of Jeremiah. His warning begins with the positive: “Do what is right”. Then Jeremiah relates from God the examples of doing right.

(1) “Do no wrong or violence to the stranger” in your midst.

(2) “Do no wrong or violence” to the orphans and the widows.

(3) Do not execute innocent people.

There is a promise from God for those who listen and obey. If the king kept the laws and enforced them then all would be well. The kingdom of David will continue. But, there is also a promise for those who do not listen but disobey. Everything will be laid waste in ruins.

This message cannot be more simple. Obey and be blessed. Disobey and be destroyed.

II. A Warning to the King (Jeremiah 22:13-17).

***13 “Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness,
his upper rooms by injustice,
making his own people work for nothing,
not paying them for their labor.***

***14 He says, ‘I will build myself a great palace
With spacious upper rooms.’***

So he make large windows in it,

Panels it with cedar

And decorates it in red.

14 “Does it make you a king

To have more and more cedar?

Did not your father have food and drink?

He did what was right and just,

So all went well with him.

16 He defended the cause of the poor and needy,

And so all went well.

Is that not what it means to know me?”

declares the Lord.

17 “But your eyes and your heart

Are set only on dishonest gain,

On shedding innocent blood

And on oppression and extortion.

The main point of this text is the responsibility of the ruler of God's people to maintain justice and protect the weak. King Josiah who ruled from 640-609 BC was one of the best kings. His rule of 31 years was followed by Jehoahaz who only ruled 3 months, but was a bad king. Jehoiaquim would reign for 11 years and was known as a wicked king. These verses tell what was said to Jehoiaquim. This poetic passage announced a terrible judgment upon him. His condemnation was more severe than that of any other kings. He failed to live up to Yahwah's high standards.

He built his palace by unrighteous means. Jeremiah's question is: What makes a king a king? Is it a large palace made with cedar containing large upper rooms containing

many windows? Must it be decorated in red? Is it right for the king to make his subjects labor as slaves to build it? This is some of the most sarcastic language found in the book.

There is a contrast between Jehoiakim and Josiah. Josiah who lived well was obedient. Josiah had plenty of food and drink. He did what was right and defended the poor and needy. All was well with him.

What defines the true relationship between the king and the Lord? That is what is asked in the questions. Is it building a palace or is it doing what is righteous which means taking care of the poor and innocent?

The condemnation was strong. Jehoiakim chose the wrong path. Jehoiakim did evil. He set his sights upon himself. He shed innocent blood. He oppressed his subjects and extorted from them.

Verse 17 implies in the accusation that Jehoiakim did not even know the Lord.

III. The Condemnation of the False Prophets (Jeremiah 23:9-18).

9 Concerning the prophets:

My heart is broken within me;

all my bones tremble.

I am like a drunken man,

Like a strong man overcome by wine,

Because of the Lord

And his holy words.

10 The land is full of adulterers;

because of the curse the land lies parched

And the pastures in the wilderness are withered.

The prophets follow an evil course

And use their power unjustly.

11 Both prophet and priest are godless;

even in my temple I find their wickedness,

declares the Lord.

12 “Therefore their path will become slippery;

They will be banished to darkness

And there they will fall.

I will bring disaster on them

in the year they are punished,”

declares the Lord.

13 “Among the prophets of Samaria

I saw this repulsive thing:

They prophesied by Baal

and led my people astray.

14 And among the prophets of Jerusalem

***I have seen something horrible;
They commit adultery and live a lie,
They strengthen the hands of evildoers,
so that not one of them turns from their wickedness.
They are all like Sodom to me;
the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah.”
15 Therefore this is what the Lord Almighty says concerning the prophets:
“I will make them eat bitter food
and drink poisoned water,
because from the prophets of Jerusalem
ungodliness has spread throughout the land.”
16 This is what the Lord Almighty says;
“Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you;
they fill you with false hopes.
They speak visions from their own minds,
not from the mouth of the Lord.
17 They keep saying to those who despise me,
‘The Lord says: You will have peace.’
And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts
they say, ‘No harm will come to you.’
18 But which of them has stood in the council of the Lord
to see or to hear his word?
Who has listened and heard his word?***

Jeremiah is so distraught by the sins of the people and their willingness to put their confidence in false prophets that he lost control of his emotions. He saw their future and it broke his heart. He felt so helpless because they would not listen.

What a scathing condemnation this is to the false prophets and priests in Jerusalem. Upon them he heaps much of the responsibility for the condition of Judah. It is their spiritual leadership that has caused the leaders and people to go down the slippery slope to their doom and destruction. “Ungodliness has spread throughout the land. What is seen is “repulsive”, which means tasteless, insipid, unsavory, that would leave a bad taste in the mouth.

Their lives are spent in adultery and lies. The adultery may have been sexual or it may have been spiritual, or both. God compares them to the prophets of Samaria, and the people to those who had lived in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The messages, those filled with false hopes, that the spiritual leaders are giving the people come from the own minds and not from the voice of God. Their messages of peace did not come from “the council of the Lord”, because they have not sought it.

The tragedy is more than false teachers. It is the tragedy of false hearers. Throughout history mankind has listened to the words of false teachers because it is what they want to hear. God is tuned out because He desires obedience.

Implications:

Kings and national leaders are held accountable for the wellbeing of their people.

God's spiritual leaders are held accountable to God to proclaim His truth to the people.

Individuals are accountable to God. To expect God's blessings without repentance is foolish.

Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:

Note carefully the above implications. Accountability and consequences go hand in hand—both for positive and for negative decisions. Your task as leader of this study will ultimately to convince the participants of the reality and seriousness of this in all of their life's situations, both corporately and individually.

For Personal Reflection:

What have I learned from this study?

What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?

What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

Warning to Unfaithful Leaders

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

Focal Text

Jeremiah 22:1-5, 13-17; 23:9-18

Background

Jeremiah 22:1—23:40

Main Idea

Leaders are accountable to God for giving leadership in accord with God's instructions.

Question to Explore

How faithful are you to the responsibilities God has given you?

Teaching Aim

To lead the church to identify implications of God's standards for faithful leaders.

Connect with Life:

It is easy to become critical when studying a lesson such as this. Resist the temptation. Make a positive application.

Guide the Study:

Begin by reading the following to the group. The Bible is a book dealing with God's mercy and love. From the fall of man in the Garden of Eden to the present He makes the effort to woo sinful mankind back to Himself. Before the Bible was in the form we have today he began to use prophets and preachers to proclaim His Word. There are those within the human race who have resisted God's attempt to bring about

reconciliation and have led others to follow them. The book of Jeremiah is about one preacher's attempt to speak for God and the kings, priests and people who resisted him. This lesson is about unfaithful leaders.

1. A Warning to Judah (Jeremiah 22:1-7).

Ask someone to read the passage.

Make sure the group understands this is about **"what the Lord says"**, verse 1.

Tell them to look at verse 2. **"Hear the word of the Lord to you."**

Let them know: It is the word of God that is the primary focus of Jeremiah. Never let the man become predominant over God's Word.

Set the stage: Jeremiah was probably in the temple when God spoke to him. The temple mount was higher than the location of the palace. He was to place himself at an entrance to the palace in order to speak to all facets of society - the people, the officials, and the king.

Ask: What was the warning Jeremiah was to proclaim? Give them time to read through the passage and pick out the salient points. You may want to have these written on a white board or large piece of paper. (Do what is just and right; do no wrong or violence to the stranger; Do no violence or oppress orphans and widows; do not execute innocent people.)

Tell them: How one treats another reflects how one is related to God. In the New Testament we find ***And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.*** (1 John 4:21, KJV)

Now ask: Is there any promise from God with the warning Jeremiah brought? What is it? (Obey and be blessed. Disobey and be destroyed.)

Be sure the class understands God wants to bless much more than He wants to curse. His desire is restoration and reconciliation.

2. A Warning to the King (Jeremiah 22:13-17).

Ask: Is there someone who would like to read this poetic passage. (22:13-17)

Tell them: the main point of this passage is on the responsibility of the ruler of God's people, at this point Jehoiakim, to maintain justice and protect the weak. This passage pronounces a terrible judgment upon him.

Ask: What does God pick as an object lesson to point out Jehoiakim's sins? (He built a magnificent palace using the labour of his people.)

Consider this for a moment. Does an opulent palace built with virtually slave labour honour God more than being a king who protects his people?

Ask: Who does it honour?

Emphasize: Getting more for self is not why we were placed upon the earth. We were placed here to know God.

Then, What does it mean to know God? (Doing what is right and just; defending the cause of the poor and needy)

Point out: The father mentioned is Josiah. (Josiah was a good king who ruled for 31 years beginning when he was 8 years old. He began restoring the temple and found the laws of Moses when restoring the temple; he turned to the Lord completely – See 2 Kings 21:24; 22:2; 2 Chronicles 33:25).

Share: The most glaring sin here and perhaps in the lives of us all is that of selfishness and self indulgence. We are not immune from this.

3. The Condemnation of the False Prophets (Jeremiah 23:9-18).

Ask: What is a false prophet? (Make sure they understand that a false prophet does not consult God. His prophesies will not come true at the hand of God.)

Have someone read Jeremiah 23: 9-14 and another person read Jeremiah 23: 15-18. These are dramatic passages and it would be well to assign them ahead of the class time so they can be read effectively.

Note again the emphasis on “this is what the Lord Almighty says”.

Show them: Jeremiah became so distraught by the sins of the people and their willingness to place their confidence in false prophets that he lost control of his emotions. (Verse 9)

Question them as to why they think there was such a scathing condemnation of the prophets. Their spiritual leadership reached into all the lives of Israel from the king down to the poorest. “Ungodliness has spread throughout the land” (Verse 15)

Make sure they understand: False prophets are set to oppose Jeremiah's message. They fill the ears of Judah with false hope.

Explain: There is more to this tragedy than false prophets. There is the tragedy of false hearers. People heard what they wanted to hear and believed what they wanted to believe. We must be careful today to be discerning of the Christian books we read and

the Christian teachers and preachers we follow. We have a responsibility as believers and a part of the priesthood of believers.

Add: See once again it is the sin of selfishness. Whenever man decides for himself what he wants to hear rather than the truth of God he is destined for an eternity apart from God.

Now ask: Who do you listen to for spiritual help? Be discerning because there are those who are false prophets today. Test what is said and see if it conforms to what has already been revealed in God's Word.

Encourage Application:

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Conclude with this advice: Be sure the leaders you follow are leaders who are following God. We are much too accepting of some preacher or teacher or author as a spiritual hero simply because he or she is popular across the Christian world. God gives discernment to followers who seek it.

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

YOUTH!!! TAKE TEN

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

Warning to Unfaithful Leaders

Jeremiah 22:1-5, 13-17; 23:9-18

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

Faithful / Unfaithful

Ask yourselves what does faithful mean? Give them time to think and respond.

Then ask: what does unfaithful mean?.

Have a dictionary ready in case it is needed for a definition.

Open your Bibles and find persons who you think are faithful leaders and those you think are unfaithful? One of you write the names down in two lists: FAITHFUL and UNFAITHFUL.

Discuss as to which leaders are worthy of being followed.

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***Warning to Unfaithful Leaders*****Jeremiah 22:1-5, 13-17; 23:9-18****Beginning the Service:**

Sing

Let It Be Said of Us, *The Worship Hymnal* #597; CCLI #1855882**Find Us Faithful**, *The Worship Hymnal* 598; CCLI #18259**Offering:**

An offering is a gift for God. It is not something God needs in order to exist. It is rather a thank you gift for blessings already received. Think about how you have been blessed and give accordingly.

Praying for the World:

Use this time to pray for individuals whom you know are carrying the Gospel to an unreached group. An unreached people group share a common culture and/or language and has no known access to the Gospel. If you do not know anyone pray for missionaries in general. None of us can pray more than we need to do.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

Remaining Faithful

Mark 4:1-9

It is important that leaders and followers remain faithful no matter the outcome.

Read the following passage aloud to the group.

¹ Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge.

² He taught them by many parables, and in his teaching said:

³ "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed.

⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.

⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain.

⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, and grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times."

⁹ Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear." (Mark 4:1-9)

There was a man who wanted to start a business raising trees for eventual sale. He got in touch with a Tree Growers Association and became a member. With their help he bought a thousand trees and planted them on a small tract of land.

About 900 of those trees died almost immediately. Even though he planted them with the green side up he did not know about what was called "J rooting". "J rooting" is when the planter forces the plant into the ground so hard the tap root turns upward instead of going downward. The planter turned nearly all the roots up and they died.

That did not deter him. He went and got some more trees. He planted them the next year and most of them lived. But, they grew at varying speeds depending upon the soil of the field. He did not know that he was supposed to prepare the field. He just thought you could plant pines and they would grow.

As each year came and went one obvious principle emerged. If you do not plant the trees they would not grow. So every time one died he planted another. Every time he sold one he planted another. He knew there would come a time when he could harvest them. Although we might admire his perseverance, we wonder why he did not also seek advice on how to prepare the field and plant wisely.

However, the main teaching of the parable we are going to look at today is, “you can harvest only what you sow”. We must grasp this concept if we are to see the kingdom grow. Neither our individual lives nor the life of the church will be healthy and what Jesus intends for it to be if we are not busy sharing the gospel with others.

Parables are earthly stories with a heavenly meaning. Parables are meant to be heard and responded to, to be acted upon. For those who wanted understanding Jesus would teach them to understand. The more one understands the more one is able to understand. The question for each one today is: “Do you want to understand?”

When the disciples were alone with Jesus they asked Him to explain the parable (Mark 4:10).

Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?” (Mark 4:13).

Jesus taught His followers by using parables. They were means He used to help them understand the meaning of the kingdom and ministry here on earth. Notice Jesus says, ***“If you do not understand this parable you will have a difficult time understanding the others I am going to teach you.”*** That is important. It brings them to attention.

Jesus’ taught by building upon previous teaching. He began with one foundational truth and built upon it. In order to understand what was coming next they would have to grasp each step.

Here was one of them. ***“The farmer sows the word”*** (Mark 4:14). Just as the tree farmer would not have any trees growing on his farm, the farmer with seed would have no crop if he did not sow the seed. You can only reap if you sow.

The parable is a reality story. This is the way things happen in the real world. The seed is sown, but not everyone receives the seed alike. But, the seed must be sown. It must be sown everywhere, then let God take care of the rest. Everyone in the world falls into one of these four categories.

15 Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them (Mark 4:15).

The first group hears the word but fails to receive it. Satan takes the word away. These believers do not stand against him. This is like a farmer sowing seed when there are birds around and as soon as the seed hits the ground the birds snatch it up.

The second group hears the word, receives it with joy, but these believers take no root and are easily offended because of the word and are barren. They do not survive when persecution comes.

The third group hears the word and receives, but later are caught up in the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things. All these things choke the word and make these hearers unfruitful or barren.

The fourth group hears the word, receives it, and bears fruit. There are differing rates of fruit bearing, but all bear fruit.

Each and every one hears, but all do not respond in the same way. If the farmer had stopped sowing with the first three there would not have been any harvest at all.

You and I are to sow the word everywhere. **It is the word that makes people whole.** It is the word of God that they respond to. It is the word of God that reveals to them the Word – Jesus Christ. It is Jesus, the Gospel of Christ that saves. But, they must hear from us. That's our sowing of the word.

Call to Commitment:

14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? (Romans 10:14).

This passage is similar to the Great Commission. Everyone is to proclaim the Gospel. Paul was not talking about ordained preachers only. It is not the job of the ordained preachers by themselves. This is the beauty of home church. We all share in the teaching and leading and we all share our faith in the word.

There is a principle that applies in business and in seed sowing. People who sell door-to-door do not miss a house. They call back if no one is home. They go to a neighborhood and knock on every door until they get an answer. Not everyone who is talked to will buy. But, if he did not talk to everyone he would miss some that would respond.

Sowing the seed in a community is just like that. Not everyone will respond, but you do not want to miss a door just in case the person behind that door was the one God had prepared to hear. You and I are responsible for the sowing. God takes care of the growth and prepares for the harvest. Realities differ from location to location. Actual door-to-door visiting may be acceptable and possible in some cultures; not-so-

acceptable in others and absolutely prohibited in many. Nonetheless each believer has the responsibility to sow the seed of the gospel in the ways and places in which God places him or her.

Ask if there is anyone in the group who has listened today and believes that the Spirit of God is calling him/her to trust Jesus and become a committed seed sower. (Adapt this to the needs of your group – the call to commitment may be to a more deliberate sharing of the gospel).

Concluding the Service:

Pray for a heart that sees the need for sowing the seed of the Gospel.

Sing again:

Find Us Faithful, *The Worship Hymnal* 598; CCLI #18259