

WHAT HAPPENED TO JOE AND JANE?

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It happens in more families than you would think. A dedicated Christian couple had five children. They taught their children the things of the Lord. Those children grew up in a godly Christian family and a good Bible-believing church. Four of them followed the Lord, including some going into the ministry and some going to the mission field. One went astray what happens? That is the kind of thing that breaks a mother's heart.

It happens in every church. Let's call them Joe and Jane. They come. They even get involved. Then they disappear. You look around one day and say, "Hey, where are Joe and Jane?"

There are a lot of reasons why people don't stay or leave a church. Visitors come and go because they are looking for something specific the church they are visiting does not offer. Singles visit a church looking for a singles group and that church doesn't have a singles group. People who come and stay a while and leave because they move out of town.

As any pastor thinks through the list of people who were once in his church but are no longer there, he realizes that some are not there because they died, got a divorce (and more embarrassed), or had a different doctrine than the church (tongues). Others were not there because they wanted a ministry his church did not have (for their kids) or they wanted to run the show (Ed and Pam). Then there are those who moved out of town had to work on Sunday. Laziness gets some. They are called bedside Baptist, mattress Methodist, and pillow Presbyterians.

Beyond all of those explanations, there are spiritual reasons you don't see Joe or Jane anymore.

The Parable

The Wayside "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it" (8:5). As a sower sowed seed, some fell by the wayside. The wayside is a reference to the path where people walked. Hence, as a result of people trampling on it, the ground was hard. Think paved sidewalk. When the seed landed on the path, it was not able to germinate. The seed falling on the pathway produces a no life whatsoever. Birds devoured it.

The Rocky Soil "Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture" (8:6). Since some seed took root, the rock must have had at least some soil on top of it. The seed was able to germinate. Life sprang up, but because of the lack of moisture in this kind of soil, the plant withered in the heat of the sun.

The Thorns "And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it" (8:7). Some seed fell on the ground filled with thorns and the seed and the thorns sprang up together. Again, the seed germinated. Life sprang up, but the thorns choked-out the plant so that it did not grow.

The Good Ground "But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold" When He had said these things He cried, "He who has ears to hear, let him

hear!” (8:8). On the good ground, the seed not only germinated, but it also produced fruit, a hundredfold (Gen. 26:12).

The Interpretation

“Then His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘What does this parable mean?’ And He said, ‘To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest *it is given* in parables, that ‘Seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’ Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God” (8:9-11). Parables reveal and conceal. There is sight without seeing and hearing without understanding. The Word is primarily the Word preached by Jesus but secondarily the message proclaimed by His followers.

The Wayside “Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved” (8:12). Satan plucked of the seed from the heart before it could germinate (2 Cor. 4:4). Thus, the seed that fell upon the path represents those who did not get saved.

The Rocky Soil “But the ones on the rock *are those* who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away” (8:13). As has been pointed out, the seed that fell upon the rocky ground was able to germinate; life sprang up, but the soil lacked moisture (8:6). The question is, “Are these people saved?” Most commentators conclude that they were not saved because they only believed *for a while* (see *endure* only for a while in Mt. 13:21; Mk. 4:17). The text, however, indicated they were saved. The seed germinated; life sprang up (8:6). Furthermore, they believed and Jesus just said that those who believe are saved (8:12).

They only thing that could possibly indicate that they were not saved is that they believed for a while. Therefore, the question becomes, “Can a genuine believer believe for a while?” Apparently. What happens? The Greek word translated “temptation” means “trial, temptation.” Matthew’s account says, “Tribulation or persecution arises because of the word” (Mt. 13:21). Mark’s account says, “Tribulation or persecution arises for the word’s sake” (Mk. 4:17). The trial is persecution because of the Word. Godet relates this to “the enmity of the rulers, the rage of the Pharisees, the danger of excommunication.”

Instead of enduring in the faith, they fall away. The Greek word translated “fall away” means “to stand off, depart from, withdraw from, fall away, apostatize, withdrawal oneself from.” It is used in Hebrews 3:12, which says, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God” (Heb. 3:12). Peter as an example of a genuine believer who renounced his faith because of persecution.

Two new books on John Lennon claim the ex-Beatle experienced a brief period as a born-again Christian during the 1970s. While living the life of a virtual recluse in New York’s Dakota Building, Lennon became an avid viewer and reader of American TV evangelists and, at some point during 1977, declared that he had been saved.

Robert Rosen in *Nowhere Man: The Final Days of John Lennon* (published by Soft Skull Press) cites Billy Graham as the main influence, whereas Geoffrey Giuliano in *Lennon in America* (published by Cooper Square Press) mentions both Graham and Pat Robertson. Both agree that the period during which Lennon peppered his everyday conversation with “Praise the Lord” and “Thank you, Jesus” was brief. Giuliano says it lasted for “a matter of months.” Rosen suggests it was “about two weeks.”

Both writers have based their information on sources close to Lennon and on the singer's personal diaries, which circulated shortly after his death and were retrieved by his widow, Yoko Ono. The diaries had been known for some time, but so far no writer had divulged their contents. Because of legal problems, neither Rosen nor Giuliano has been able to quote directly from the diaries, but both have drawn on the information.

"One day [Lennon] had an epiphany—he allowed himself to be touched by the love of Jesus Christ, and it drove him to tears of joy and ecstasy," writes Rosen, a New York journalist briefly employed by Ono. "He drew a picture of a crucifix; he was born again, and the experience was such a kick that he had to share it with Yoko."

Giuliano, who has written extensively about the Beatles, pinpoints the conversion to a Palm Sunday and says that Lennon was so moved by a series about Jesus broadcast on Robertson's CBN that he broke down in tears. In the following weeks, he attended church services and took his son, Sean, to a Christian theater performance. He even called The 700 Club helpline to request prayer for his health and troubled marriage. "He prayed for forgiveness when he stepped on insects or snapped at the maid," Giuliano writes. "He became convinced that Jesus was personally protecting Sean."

Ono, whose first husband, Anthony Cox, became an evangelical Christian in the 1970s, was displeased with Lennon's changed outlook. Giuliano claims Lennon began to challenge her interest in the occult and was disappointed she wouldn't join him in watching Graham's telecasts. "The dramatic conversion worried Yoko," Giuliano writes. "She feared John's new faith would clash with her own ideas about spiritualism and threaten her iron hold over him."

In the end, Ono won. In his final years, the man best known for his lines "Imagine there's no heaven/It's easy if you try" was living a life dictated by astrologers, numerologists, clairvoyants, psychics, herbalists, and tarot-card readers.

The one song that Lennon wrote during his born-again period has never been released. "You Saved My Soul," which recounts being prevented from attempting suicide while staying in a Tokyo hotel, is known only to Beatles bootleggers. (Steve Turner, "The Ballad of John and Jesus," *Christianity Today*, 6-12-00, p. 86).

The Thorny Ground "Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity" (8:14). As was pointed out earlier, the seed that fell among the thorns was able to germinate; life sprang up, but the thorns choked out the plant so that it did not grow (8:7).

Many commentators conclude that they were not saved because they did not bring fruit to maturity (Wiersbe). Such a conclusion is based on the assumption that all believers end up spiritually mature. As in the case of the seed that fell on stony ground, this seed germinated; life sprang up. The fact that they did not grow to maturity indicates that their problem was immaturity, not that they were never saved.

Constable says, "Notice that Jesus said that these 'believers' (v. 13) produce no mature fruit (cf. John 15:2). In the light of this statement, we need to examine the idea that every true believer produces fruit and that if there is no fruit the person must be lost. Fruit is what appears on the outside that other people see. It is what normally, but not always, manifests life on the inside. It is possible for a fruit tree to produce no fruit and still be a fruit tree. (In a footnote, Constable says, "Most fruit trees bear no fruit for the first few years after their planting, some stop bearing fruit after a while, and others never

bear fruit.”) Today the testimony of many Christians would lead onlookers to conclude that they are not believers because they do not produce much external evidence of the divine life within them. However, Jesus allowed for the possibility of true believers bearing no mature fruit because they allow the distractions of the world to divert them from God’s Word (cf. Jn. 15:2).”

The cares, riches, and pleasures of life hindered them from developing into spiritually mature believers. Godet says they overcame the fear of persecution but succumbed to the inward obstacle of a divided heart. Morris says they fill their lives are so many things there’s no room for spiritual fruit. Barclay says, “The thorny ground stands for those whose lives are so busy that the things of God get crowded out. We must ever remember that the things which crowd out the highest need not necessarily be bad. The worst enemy of the best is the second best.”

The Good Soil “But the ones *that* fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep *it* and bear fruit with patience” (8:15). Barclay says, “The good ground stands for the good heart. The good hearer does three things. First, he listens attentively. Second, he keeps what he hears in his mind and heart and thinks it over until he discovers its meaning for himself. Third, he acts upon it. He translates what he has heard into action.”

Those who are receptive to the Word endure and bear fruit. The Greek word translated “patience” means “to bear patiently, endure.” Plummer says it is the opposite of the falling away mentioned in Luke 8:13. Wiersbe says that fruit includes winning others to Christ (Rom. 1:13), giving money to the Lord’s work (Rom. 15:25-28), good works (Col. 1:10), Christian character (Gal. 5:22-23) and praise (Heb. 13:15).

Conclusion “No one, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel or puts *it* under a bed, but sets *it* on a lampstand, that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor *anything* hidden that will not be known and come to light” (8:16-17). Those who respond to the Word and bear fruit are a lamp to others. Don’t hide the light. Let your light be seen. Jesus goes on to explain (“for”) that secret things will be made known and come to light. All will be revealed on Judgment day.

“Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him *more* will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him” (8:18). The thought seems to be, “Take heed how you hear: he who hears the word profitably will profit yet more; he who hears carelessly will lose even what he seems to have” (Creed). Whoever welcomes the Word and appropriates it is capable of receiving more (Plummer). Those who have an obedient heart will be given a deeper and more intense insight into the spiritual life and into His Word (Geldenhuys).

The expression “what he seems to have” means “what he thinks he has.” The issue is self-deception (Plummer). Those who have a disobedient heart lose what little measure of spiritual knowledge and joy they possess (Geldenhuys).

Barclay says, “Verse 18 lays down the universal law that the man who has will get more; and that the man who has not will lose what he has. If a man is physically fit and keeps himself so, his body will be ready for ever greater efforts; if he lets himself go flabby, he will lose even the abilities he has. The more a student learns, the more he can learn; but if he refuses to go on learning, he will lose the knowledge he has. This is just another way of saying that there is no standing still in life. All the time we are either

going forward or going back. The seeker will always find, but the man who stops seeking will lose even what he has.”

Summary: When the Word is preached, some endure (continue) to maturity, but many do not because of the work of the devil, the world, or the flesh.

This parable explains what happens in Christian homes.

This parable explains what happens in churches. The soils represent those who hear the Word preached. Jesus says, “Take heed how you hear” (8:18). There are four options. Wiersbe calls the four kinds of soil the hard soil, the shallow soil, the crowded soil and the good soil.

Some hear the Word, but do not understand it. Some do not understand the gospel and, consequently, do not get saved (8:10, 12).

Some hear the Word and forget what is said. Some understand and even believe, but because of external pressure, such as persecution, they only believed for a while. The world: the wife doesn’t come because of her husband or the husband doesn’t come because of his wife.

Some hear the Word, but the Word is crowded out by the world. Some understand and believe that the cares, riches, and pleasures of life prevent them from reaching spiritual maturity. The flesh would rather play golf or refuse to get married.

Some hear the Word, understand it, respond to it, and bear fruit. Only a relatively small percent understand, believe, obey, and consequently produce fruit and endure. Which kind of soil are you?

This parable explains what happens in people’s hearts. Take this personally. Which kind of soil are you? The issue is not *how much* you hear but how *well* you hear the Word of God.

This parable is not intended to be taken mathematically. If it were, 25% are not save, 25% fell away because of the world, and 25% were overcome by the flesh. Only 25% produced fruit and of that 25%, not all produced all the fruit they could or should. Jesus speaks of 30%, 60%, and 100%. That means only 8% produce all the fruit they can. I want to be in that 10%.