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# VERITAS

*Equipping Christians to live by truth—veritas—from God.*



## Listen Up!

*Hearing  
is a  
Heart Issue*

by Dr. Mark L. Bailey

DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

## DISTINGUISHED SPEAKER



*Dr. Mark L. Bailey*

**Dr. Mark Bailey's** love for Dallas Theological Seminary began when he was a student. He went on to become professor of Bible Exposition, vice president for academic affairs, academic dean, and provost before he accepted his current role as the school's fifth president.

He earned his bachelor's degree from Southwestern College in Phoenix, two master's degrees from Western Conservative Baptist Seminary in Portland, and his doctorate from Dallas Seminary. Within the past 10 years, he has authored *To Follow Him: The Seven Marks of a Disciple* (Multnomah, 1997) and co-authored *The New Testament Explorer* (Word, 1999).

Theological education and pastoral ministry have been Dr. Bailey's career passions. While teaching and holding administrative roles at Dallas Seminary, he was also the senior pastor at Faith Bible Church in DeSoto, Texas, from 1994 to 2000.

Dr. Bailey has guided tours to Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, and Rome and has served in missions in Argentina, Venezuela, and Hungary. He and his wife, Barbara, have two sons, Joshua, who is married to Emily, and Jeremy. They also have two grandchildren, Fiona and Gavin.

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**VERITAS**



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# Listen Up!



**A**ccording to Dallas Seminary president Dr. Mark Bailey, it is vitally important *how* we listen to the Word of God when we are confronted with its truths. Jesus stressed many times how crucial it is for His followers to make sure that their hearts are fertile ground into which the “seed” of His Word can be sown, find nourishment, and grow as we produce a spiritual harvest for God. Dr. Bailey’s powerful message, originally delivered at a Dallas Seminary chapel service, will help you understand what it takes to truly hear and heed the Scriptures.

**T**here is a story that has been told of former president Franklin D. Roosevelt, who often endured long receiving lines at the White House and complained that no one really paid any attention to what anyone said. So during one particular reception, Roosevelt decided to try an experiment.



As each person passed down the line and shook the president's hand, he murmured in their ear that he had murdered his grandmother that morning. But the guests just responded with phrases like "Marvelous" and "Keep up the good work; we're proud of you." It was not until the end of the line, while Roosevelt was greeting the ambassador from Bolivia, that the president's statement was actually heard. The ambassador leaned over and whispered to Roosevelt, "I am sure she had it coming!"

## A Failure to Communicate

If you took a speech class in school or studied the dynamics of communication in another course, you know that effective communication makes a demand on the hearer as well as the speaker. My opening story illustrates so well one of the main problems in human communication, which is that what is *heard* is not always what was *said*. The result is a failure to communicate—and when it comes to God's Word, this failure has serious implications.

One of the most frustrating things for the pastor of a church is the failure of the Word of God to take root in the lives of those who listen week after week. Nothing is more disheartening than to watch the best of God's truth pass over

the head of the intended receiver. It might be the right time and the truth may be relevant, but there may be no results.

It's important for us to be reminded that every time we listen to God's Word being taught and every time we open the Book ourselves to read or study, there are some resistant dynamics at work, both internal and external. Our challenge is to be aware of these dynamics and make sure that our ears are truly open to the Word and our hearts are fertile soils for its truths.

## The Parable of the Soils

The imagery of seed and soils is one Jesus used in a parable He taught that helps reveal the mysteries of the kingdom. This is the parable of the sower and the soils that is repeated in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8. For this message, I want to look at the parable as recorded in Mark 4:1–20, which I urge you to read for yourself.

**It's important for us to be reminded that every time we listen to God's Word being taught and every time we open the Book ourselves to read or study, there are some resistant dynamics at work, both internal and external.**

By way of background, Mark 3:22–30 shows why Jesus changed His teaching method to parables. Israel's leaders accused Jesus of having a demon. Jesus responded that if He had a demon, they had committed the unpardonable sin, which is defined as ascribing to Satan the works of the Holy Spirit as performed by Christ in His earthly ministry. Jesus rejected this charge, of course, and began to speak to the people in biblical wisdom sayings such as the parable of the soils. Jesus' purposes for using parables were to reveal truth to those who had receptive hearts and to conceal truth from those who had rejected Him.

In Mark 4:3–8, Jesus told the parable of the four soils on which the seed fell, representing four kinds of human response to the Word of God. These are the soil beside

**Hearing, accepting, understanding, and then using God's Word will determine the kind of fruitfulness that God will produce in our lives.**

the road, the rocky soil, the soil that was full of thorns, and finally the good soil that received the seed and produced a crop. Then He punctuated His message with this critical admonition: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (v. 9).

These soils describe three reasons why the Word of God doesn't take root and produce the desired fruit in some people and one reason why others are so fruitful.

Before we look at each part of the parable, notice the disciples' reaction when Jesus asked them, "Don't you understand this parable?" (Mark 4:13). They did not, so Jesus went on, "How then will you understand any parable?"

Jesus' point is that what we hear will determine what we understand and how we understand will determine how we accept God's truth. Hearing, accepting, understanding, and then using God's Word will determine the fruitfulness that God will produce in our lives. It is a chain reaction, a chain effect.

### ● **First Soil: Satanic Interruption**

The first impediment to the effective hearing of and fruitful obedience to God's Word is what we might call satanic interruption. This is pictured by the seed that was sown along the path. In the Middle East, the wayside soil was on



paths around or even through a field. As they are trampled down, the soil becomes hard. Like seed falling on trampled ground and the birds eating it off the surface, when the Word of God is proclaimed, Satan comes and snatches away the

Word that has been sown in the “soil” of the listener’s heart. We see an example of this in 2 Corinthians 4, where Paul writes, “Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (vv. 3–4). Every time the Word of God is sown, there’s an opportunity for the enemy to snatch away that message. Satan intends to destroy our witness and make our lives fruitless by keeping the Word from taking root within those who hear the gospel.

### ● **Second Soil: External Opposition**

There’s a second soil in Mark 4, illustrated by the rocky ground. Shallow topsoil on top of underlying layers of limestone produces an artificial greenhouse effect. But because there is little moisture in Israel’s climate and a lot of heat, when a seed falls on this kind of soil, there may be premature germination. What seems at first like a fast-growing plant, it sprouts and then withers and dies and does not last.



In a similar way, there are people on whose ears and hearts the seed of God’s Word falls. When they hear the Word, as Jesus said, they receive it with joy at first, but they have no firm root and so the response is only temporary. When affliction arises because of the Word, immediately they fall away. This resistant dynamic is what we could identify as external opposition.

Some of the reasons people fall away when their commitment to Christ is shallow are tribulations and afflictions. Tribulations are allowed by God and probably most often take the form of circumstances. Afflictions are advanced by one’s enemies and, for most of us, probably

involve more criticism than crushing blows. In some parts of our world, we know that opposition leads to physical affliction and maybe even death as well.

Let's add temptation to the list, which is being led away and enticed to not live life God's way. Perhaps you have taken a stand for Christ and received some flak for your faith. I have talked to enough of our students here at Dallas Seminary to know that, for some, this was the most foolish decision their parents thought that they could make.

For others, it was a friend who just didn't understand the student's response to the grace of God in faith, and they haven't figured that out yet. When one takes a stand for Christ, then friends may say, "You really don't believe that, do you?!"

In the face of persecution and affliction (whether it's verbal or physical), some people are going to want to relent and fall away like a shallow plant with no root. They may say yes to the Word of God, but when persecution comes, it turns out to be a temporary commitment with a temporary response, and fruitfulness is not found.

### ● **Third Soil: Internal Distraction**

There's a third soil on which the seed of God's Word can fall, which illustrates the internal distractions of life that can choke off our response. This is represented by the seed that falls among the thorns. These are the people who have heard the Word, but "the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful" (Mark 4:19).



In the culture of Israel, as elsewhere,

there are thorns you don't plant; they just grow naturally in an uncultivated field (and sometimes even in a cultivated field). At the root level the thistles wrap their roots around the good plant and choke out its life.

Notice the three "thorns" Jesus described. One is humanism, an overemphasis on self. The second is materialism, an overemphasis on security. And the third is hedonism, an overemphasis on satisfaction. These internal distractions can easily draw us away from the Word once it has been sown.

Jesus would say to us today, "Listen up! I know you can hear because you have ears. But having ears, you need to hear what I am saying." One writer has said, "Christianity is fighting a losing battle today, not because God's people are bad, but because we are too busy with our briefcases full of second-rate stuff."

● **Fourth Soil:  
Welcoming Reception**

Aren't you glad there is a fourth soil? The whole purpose of Jesus' parable is to drive us to this fourth soil, which I would describe as the welcoming reception for God's Word. There are resistant dynamics at work when the Word is shared, but thank God there can be receptive dynamics as well!

**Jesus would say to us today, "Listen up! I know you can hear because you have ears. But having ears, you need to hear what I am saying."**

Jesus mentioned three levels of fruitfulness produced in the good soil. The good soil represents the heart that hears and heeds the Word as it is sown. These different levels remind us that although we are not all the same in our levels of maturity, abilities, or opportunities, we can all be fruitful for the Lord.

So the point of Jesus' parable is the importance of having a heart that has been readied and cultivated to respond to the

Word and the will of God—a heart that wants to hear God’s Word to understand it and to do what He says.

## **Cultivating Your “Soil”**

According to Jesus, no message is complete until we as hearers or readers respond to what has been learned. So let me give you three ways you can apply this message today, stated as principles with corresponding challenges.

First, Jesus laid the responsibility for productivity on the hearer (or the reader) of His truth. It’s the same seed or message of the Word in each case. The different soil conditions represent different conditions of the heart. So my first challenge to you is to cultivate your heart. Keep it from being crusted over, packed down, hardened, or distracted by the enemy or by the circumstances of life. Stay ready and pliable to hear and accept the truths of God’s Word.

My second challenge is to think about what God has called you to be and to do. How can you best prepare yourself for the reproductive ministries God wants you to do? The place to start is to bathe your heart and mind in His Word.

Third, as I previously noted, our fruitfulness may be abundant, but it will not necessarily be uniform. Even in the good soil, the plants in Jesus’ parable grew and produced crops at different rates. Therefore, the challenge is to be patient with yourself and with others. If you really want to know God’s Word and His will and you come with a good and honest heart, there will be understanding. Your life will be prepared to be used by God to produce the fruit of the Spirit and the fruit of reproductive ministries as others come to faith and grow to maturity.

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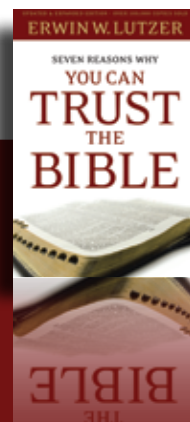
SEVEN REASONS WHY  
YOU CAN  
TRUST  
THE BIBLE

Dr. Erwin Lutzer Gives You Seven Compelling  
Reasons Why You Can Trust the Bible as God's  
Authoritative Word

God has left us a single, trustworthy source that reveals who He is, His purpose for life, and His desire to transform people who will take Him at His Word.

This source is the Bible. As Christians, we affirm that the Bible is God's revealed Word, our sole authority for life and faith. Yet critics declare that the Scriptures are unreliable and inaccurate. These skeptics' arguments, which used to be confined largely to the academic realm, have been popularized by a number of recent books, such as *The Da Vinci Code*.

To help you answer the skeptics, Dr. Erwin Lutzer offers you solid arguments for the trustworthiness of Scripture in his book *Seven Reasons Why You Can Trust the Bible*. Dr. Lutzer, who is a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary and pastor of Chicago's famed Moody Memorial Church, shows you why the Bible's stories, claims, and predictions are true.



The insights in this newly revised edition of Dr. Lutzer's book will help you grow in faith—and enable you to respond confidently to doubters!

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Dr. Mark L. Bailey

*Journeys of Paul Cruise  
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## 'Keeping Static Off the Line' in Our Hearts

Whenever I teach or preach, I pray that God will remove any obstruction that keeps people from hearing the message of the gospel—including me!

Of course, Jesus did not have the problem we humans have of presenting the message imperfectly, which is a hazard with which all of us must deal. But it's instructive to note that in the parable of the soils, He still called on the hearers to make sure they heard with open and receptive hearts. And we know that this process is far from being straightforward, much less automatic. There is truly a supernatural battle going on for the hearts and minds of people.

With that in mind, allow me to give you several very important requests I hope you will add to your prayer list. The first request is for yourself and others, that God would remove the interruptions, obstructions, and distractions that can occur when the Word of God is presented.

I also urge you to pray for our Dallas Seminary graduates who are ministering around the world, that God would be pleased to open ears and hearts to the gospel.

I wanted to mention an exciting travel and learning opportunity I hope you will take advantage of. Dr. Erwin Lutzer, well-known Dallas Seminary graduate, pastor of Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, and the author of *Seven Reasons Why You Can Trust the Bible* being offered in this issue of *Veritas*, will be joining us on a special DTS cruise in July 2009 that will retrace the missionary journeys of Paul. Dove Award winning artist Steve Green is joining us to lead worship!

You may go to [www.dts.edu/supporters/travel](http://www.dts.edu/supporters/travel) to learn more about this very exciting trip or to reserve your place. It would be great to see you there next year. And in the meantime, thank you for your faithful support of Dallas Seminary!

**Dr. Mark L. Bailey**  
President  
Dallas Theological Seminary