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Satan Steals the Seed

524-A

Series: Testing

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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It is test time again. I want to make it brief. Occasionally I want to make absolutely certain that you have been learning the concepts in these last lessons on testing. The subject of this series of lessons has been why God tests His children. We found that there are a number of reasons. We have dealt with the first eight, and we are in the midst of the ninth reason. I hope the other eight are permanently etched in your mind. I want to ask you why God tests His children.

IN REVIEW

Reason 1- Our responses are not His. He tests us to develop the mind of Christ in us.

Reason 2- We are blinded to our own imperfections. He tests us to expose our weaknesses.

Reason 3- We tend to become proud in our spirituality, so He tests us to humble us.

Reason 4- There are places and times when we are needed. He tests us to advance the kingdom. He strategically places us in positions of need.

Reason 5- Oftentimes, we are not faithful. He tests us to draw us to the Word.

Reason 6- The world so affects our understanding. He tests us to enlarge our vision of Himself.

Reason 7- We tend to become self-centered in our lives. He tests us to equip us to minister to others.

Reason 8- We tend to become apathetic. He tests us to teach us experientially how to pray.

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Reason 9- God tests us to prove to Satan how faithful He is and how much grace and power He really has. He tests us to prove to Satan that God is all that He says He is.

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Satan and God are locked in a life or death struggle for the control of our lives. Therefore, every incident is no accident and has spiritual significance in the spiritual conflict that is going on. The little decisions and the experiences that take place are important. To stand and stare for the rest of our lives at the battle until we become shell-shocked is not wise. Likewise, to stand in the middle of the battlefield chewing bubble gum, unmindful of the fact that there is a battle going on, is even dumber. Some of us live the Christian life just that way. We just wander around aimlessly as though there was not a war going on.

We have set out in the last few lessons to explore the methods and schemes of the enemy so that, like Paul, we might not be ignorant of his devices. In the last lesson, we explored the primary battlefield, which is the human mind. We saw that the primary source of testing and conflict within that mind is the Word of God in us. We looked at Eve and Satan in the garden. We re-enacted the procedure that Satan used to entrap her and take control of her mind. We saw how he finally took the seed of the Word out of her life to bring her under his control and cause her to sin. Her faithfulness to the Word of God was being tested. Ultimately, that is what is always being tested in us, our faithfulness to the Word of God.

I believe that you and I will often be tested proportionate to our exposure to the Scriptures. Why? Because the more involved you become with the Word of God, the more accountable you are to be tested.

Secondly, I believe the more you become involved in the Word of God, the more irritated and threatened the enemy becomes. He can handle anything in your life but that. He can handle our emotional ups and downs. He can even control them. He can handle circumstances. He can even cause them. But, he cannot combat the Word of God. The more you and I are in the Word, the more testing will take place in our lives because Satan is irritated and threatened that the Word of God will take control of our lives.

In the last lesson, we explored Satan's attack on the integrity of the Word in Eve's life. We dealt with the fact that he began by gaining entrance into her soul through striking up a conversation with her. We dealt with the fact that we do the same thing. We think we are talking to ourselves when ultimately we are listening to the voice of a stranger. We need to try the spirits

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to see if they be of God. If the spirit is negative, questioning, self-exalting, confusing, inconsistent, impure or apprehensive we must immediately stand on the Word and rebuke that enemy. We are not dealing with our own thoughts and we are certainly not dealing with the Spirit of God. We are dealing with the voice of a stranger.

Once Satan had Eve's attention, he began to question the principles of the Word. She fell right into his hand. She began to reason with rather than rebuke him. He said, "Hath God said?" She replied, "Yeah, hath He?" He then began, having gotten her attention, to alter the Word. She began to play right along with him. She began to accept the reduction of absolutes to areas of question. Satan then began to deny the Word of God and Eve began to ignore the intensity of the warfare.

Satan then began to offer her an alternative. He said, "I will make you a god." She thought that sounded reasonable because she always thought he had what it took. He said, "I will make you a god." She began to question the motivations of a Living God.

Satan, at that point, having all of Eve's attention, began to make evil attractive. She began to give lingering consideration to the physical benefits of sin.

Satan, then, created an opportunity for sin. Eve's response was to reach out and touch. We will remember that at this point Satan got lost. He disappeared. He was not there to comfort Eve because he is not the Comforter - he is the deceiver. As we saw in the last lesson, Eve was deceived and sinned. Since then, all of us have paid the penalty and the price for that mistake. Satan's tactics haven't changed.

The second aspect of Satan's role in testing is his overt plan of attack on the Word of God in the Christian's life. Let's turn to Mark 4:13-20. This is a familiar passage to many. I will begin by acknowledging that the primary input of this passage is perhaps an understanding of how Satan prevents or deals with unbelievers in their quest to find Christ. But there is a deeper, secondary meaning to this passage. It is to that end that we will address this passage. Jesus gives the explanation of the parable of the sower. I will read it out of the New American Standard.

And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable?
And how will you understand all the parables?"

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“The sower sows the word. (that is the seed)

“And these are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them.

“And in a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy;

and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away.

“And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word,

but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

“And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good ground (soil); and they hear the word and accept it, and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.”

(Mark 4:13-20 NASB)

I want us to deal with what I believe to be an application in the lives of Christians that is found in this passage. The basic message is that Satan desires to prevent the salvation of unbelievers. But there is a secondary application in that Satan wants to keep the Word of God from bearing fruit in your life and in my life.

Someone asked me a question this week that I didn't have an answer for. As I was studying this passage, I found an answer that I thought would fit. The question was, “How do we pray for unbelievers?” I think one way we should pray, recognizing Satan's attack to prevent unbelievers from responding to the Word of God, is outlined in Mark 4. If you want to know how to pray for unbelievers, take those three areas which we see in this passage in which Satan attacks the unbeliever. Using the Word of God, you can rebuke the enemy and fortify the person in that area so that the seed can get through and bear fruit. This is at least one way you can pray for unbelievers.

We find in Mark 4 that Satan renders the Word unusable. First of all, he steals it. He is a thief. Secondly, he afflicts or tests and turns on the heat. Thirdly, he diverts through lesser things. He steals it, he afflicts and he diverts through lesser things.

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I have to be honest with you that most of us are seemingly “Word poor”. You can’t be. But at least from a human perspective we are Word poor and spiritually unproductive. By “Word poor” I mean that we have seven to seventeen translations at home on our bookshelves. We have thirty-three commentaries. We have a room full of tapes. We are involved in two or three Bible studies a week. We come to Sunday school and church, yet many of us remain frustrated over areas of our lives that are unaffected by the Living Word of God. Something isn’t right. God burdened me to look at Satan as the thief in Mark 4, the seed snatcher who steals the Word. In the process, I was led to another passage in John 10.

Once again I realize that the primary input of John 10 is dealing with false shepherds or pastors. But we need to look at the total meaning of the passage. Look at the relationship or the parallel of John 10:10 and Mark 4:13-20. In John 10:10 we are given a parallel or two opposites. In the second half of the verse Jesus says, “I came that they might have life and have it abundantly.” Jesus said that a Spirit-controlled, Word-centered life is why He came.

The earlier part of the verse gives the opposite of that. It tells us what the thief does. He is the one who does not want us to have life abundantly. In the first part of verse 10 it says that the thief comes to steal, to kill and to destroy. These are the three things that the thief does.

I want to take these three words and three parallel thoughts in Mark 4 and focus in on one. It says that the stranger that we have listened to earlier in John 10 is the thief. His desire is to steal the Word, to kill and to destroy. He wants to steal, kill and destroy the power of the Word in our lives. He wants to steal the seed of the Word. Look at the progression of how he works. If he can, he will first steal the seed of the Word. He will try to keep the Word from ever making any inroads into our lives. The rest of this lesson will be on how Satan snatches the Word from our lives. He tries to keep the Word from having any influence or roots in our lives. He steals the seed. This is the seed that is thrown by the wayside. He is identified as the bird that comes along and eats it up. I couldn’t help but realize that it makes him sick because he can’t stand the Word. But he would rather have a stomach ache than see us get it.

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If this doesn't work, he has a second plan of attack. He kills the root of the Word. He uses the sun to destroy it. He uses the heat to kill the root before there is a chance for there to be real, honest growth. He kills the roots through affliction and persecution and the Word is discarded. In the first case, the Word is stolen. In the second case, the Word is discarded.

The third thing he does is destroy the fruits of the Word. If he hasn't been able to steal the seed or kill the roots and your life is beginning to produce fruit, his next venture is to destroy the fruits of the Word in your life. He does that through diversion. He does it through the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and the lust of having things that enter in and choke the Word. So the Word is either stolen, discarded or choked. In any case, he has won the battle.

I want to do a quick review of the meaning of these three words and the significance of the first one. The first word means to steal the Word. The Greek word is "*klepto*". It is where we get our word kleptomaniac. It doesn't mean to take by force. It doesn't mean to rob at gunpoint. It doesn't mean to plunder and take away. It literally means to snatch away from in a manner unnoticed.

Satan is a pickpocket. He is a Scriptural pickpocket. Have you ever thought of a pickpocket? They usually pose as a friend. They will put their arm around you while their other hand is in your pocket. They will start up a conversation and pretend to be a friend. They will create a diversion, and while you are thinking of something else, they will steal your billfold or purse.

Thirdly, he leaves unnoticed. Have you ever noticed this? You probably don't even realize that he is gone. All of a sudden the light dawns upon you, "Where is my wallet? Where is my purse?" You realize that a theft has taken place and you didn't know anything had happened. This is what this word means. It doesn't mean that someone has held you up so that you know what is happening. This is someone who sneaks in and snatches away something that you don't even know is gone.

I had a perfect illustration last night. We went to a football game. I took my camera to take a picture of my daughter who is a cheerleader. When we got ready to leave, I reached down to pick up my camera and it was gone. Instead of saying to myself, "This is a test," I panicked. I shouted, "Good grief, my camera is gone! Call the police!" I then realized that a friend who had been sitting

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beside me was trying to be helpful, had picked up my camera and was carrying it for me. It was gone so quickly and I wasn't paying attention. If somebody held me up and said, "Give me your camera," I might put up a fight. If I knew what was happening, I would resist, at least in my mind. But it happened so quickly, I wasn't even aware of it until I looked down and I realized it was gone. It was quite a bad feeling. This is what Satan does. He first of all steals the Word when we are not looking.

The second thing Satan does is kill. He inflicts the roots with heat. The Greek word is "*thuo*." It is one of seven words used in the Scripture that means to kill. It doesn't mean to slay needlessly or carry off and murder or murder for hire or butcher or slaughter. This word is always used in the Scripture to indicate substitutionary death or sacrifice. This word was used when Jesus was slain for the sins of the world. It was also used when the animals were slain on the altar. It is always used in this regard. It is Satan's attack on the root system, a substitute of a good life. In the heat of affliction, substitution ends in separation. Satan renders the Word ineffective by what Mark calls affliction or persecution. I found at least four places in Scripture where it says that Satan specifically does this:

1- Through physical illness. I think that God is in control and allows it, but Satan is the author of most physical illness. He does it for a purpose. I think we can prove this in Scripture. This is one of the ways he attacks the root system of the Christian when the Word has been placed there.

2- Through weakness. He knows our weaknesses. He always manages to attack in the place of our greatest weakness. When we shore up one point, he comes around to our next greatest weakness.

3- Through spiritual disunity. This is the disease that attacks the greater body, the body of Christ.

4- Through persecution. These are the pressures of the faith where the Word is not rooted.

These are the four ways that Satan goes about killing the Word in our lives.

The third major thing that Satan does is destroy. The word is "*apollumi*". It is one of nine words used in Scripture for "to destroy." This specific word doesn't mean to ruin completely, but

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to render ineffective. It means to render unavailable or unusable through ruin. The Vine Translation puts it this way, “not loss of being but loss of well-being”. It literally means to be placed on the shelf or rendered unfruitful. This is Satan’s third choice. If he can’t keep the Word from entering your life or from taking root in your life, he enters in and tries to keep you from becoming fruitful.

There are at least four ways that I found specifically in Scripture that he does this. The first is self-righteousness. The second is double-mindedness. The third is a bitter spirit. The fourth is idleness. These are the ways that Satan destroys the Word in the lives of believers. The Scripture calls them the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and the lust of other things. When these things enter our lives, they choke the Word. They destroy it and its fruitfulness. I believe that these are Satan’s four basic means of attacking the believer and the Word in the believer’s life.

Now I want to go back to the first method so that we can zero in on it. Satan needs little use of destroying the roots and the fruits if the bulk of the seed never reaches its destination, which is our heart. Satan does two things:

He blinds unbelievers so that the seed won’t be received. We see this in this verse,

...the god of this age (world) has blinded the minds of those who do not believe so that they would not see the light of the glorious gospel of Christ (and be saved.)

(II Corinthians 4:4 NET)

The first thing that Satan does is to blind the eyes of the unbelievers. We know now how to better pray for the lost.

I want to deal with how this applies to the believer. Satan snatches away and pickpockets the Word of God because he does not want it to pass through the spiritual digestive tract and be turned into spiritual strength. I want to give you a test. Write down the answers to these questions on a piece of paper.

1- How many of you have a quiet time or spend some time alone with God every morning? Now write down two or three principles from Scripture that God gave you this week from your quiet time. Describe how you have applied them.

2- How many of you are in a small group or small Bible study?

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Write down two things you learned specifically the last time your group met that apply to your life personally. Describe how you are going to implement them into your life.

3- How many of you belong to Bible Study Fellowship or another intensive Bible study method group? Name three principles of the Word that you learned this past week in your study.

4- How many of you were in Sunday School last Sunday? I have to be honest with you that when I start preparing to teach, I need to go back and read the last lesson to re-familiarize myself with what was taught. Write down the outline or major thoughts or principles in the last lesson. Many of you told me that God really spoke to you through the passage in Genesis. How many of you took that outline and did something with it as it related to your personal life?

5- How many of you were in church last Sunday? Can you remember the subject and the key points in the message? How many of you have been to hear another speaker this past week? How many of you listen to Christian teachers on the radio station or taped messages? Can you give the essence of any two messages you heard this past week and the applications to your life?

6- How many of you are doing a personal study on your own in the Word? Write down five things in the last two weeks that you have learned in your personal Bible study.

As I have said earlier, we have more translations than many Bible bookstores. We have tapes and radio stations to listen to. We have a church where the Word is taught from the pulpit on a weekly basis. The question I am asking is, “How much of the seed that is falling on you is being brushed off so that you can run to get some more seed?”

We read in John 15 that the goal of the Word of God is fruit that remains. We have to take another look. He wants every phrase of His Word to count twenty-fold, fifty-fold or a hundred-fold. He wants it to be multiplied. You and I are accountable according to or proportionate to our exposure to the Word. I want us to look at how we keep the enemy from snatching the seed. There are nine steps. We come Sunday after Sunday for teaching and we eat it up and enjoy it and get something out of it. The question is, “Why do we oftentimes have to keep going over and over the same ground?” When we hear it again, it is like we have never heard it before.

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1- Deal with unconfessed and besetting sins. The reason we do this is that diseased soil that has not been treated by I John 1:9 cannot receive the Word with all readiness of mind. Seed lays on top of the soil and Satan comes to gulp it up. I honestly believe that our ability to receive the Word sensitively we need to point our antennas in the right direction in order to photograph a clear picture of the Word as it applies to our lives. Our ability to live in perfect harmony with freedom is relative to the confessed or unconfessed sin our lives. I believe the corrosion on the antennae of our lives prevents the Word from making inroads if there is unconfessed sin or if there is besetting sin that we are setting aside and pretending that it doesn't exist. Each of us knows what the besetting sins are in our own lives. We keep telling the Lord, "I am going to another Bible study. I am going to read some more. I am going to do this. I am going to do that in order to take care of it." We basically do not want to deal with the real root problems in our lives.

There are some besetting sins we have and we say, "Well, everybody has them." This is not true. Even if everybody did, this would not justify it according to the Scripture. As we hold on to these sins we then question and wonder why the seed seems to always evaporate. Unconfessed sin and besetting sin in the Christian's life causes the seed of the Word to evaporate. You and I need to deal independently and individually with the unconfessed and besetting sin that we know of and then ask God to reveal more.

2- Ask God to feed you fruitfully and preserve the fruit. We are such creatures of habit. We come to church every Sunday. How many of us come honestly saying to God, "Open Thou my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Word?" Most of us don't. I wrote this down and I didn't do it. Don't we realize that is says, "Ask and you shall receive." The key to the whole Christian experience is that God gets the glory when His children ask.

If not, why not? Don't we want to be fed? Sure, we want to be fed, but we think it is automatic. We go and hear the Word and are around other Christians but getting fed is not automatic. It is the Spirit that gives entrance to the Word in our lives. We are not guaranteed fruit. We are guaranteed seed. It is up to us to ask God specifically to turn that seed into fruit. The next time we are in church, instead of busying ourselves with idle conversation we ought to be honestly praying not only for those about us but for

ourselves that we might get fed by the Word of God.

3- *We need to learn how to write and take notes.* When we are in a worship service, Bible study, Sunday School or seminar, we need to take notes. This concept is gleaned from Moses telling Joshua to write down what was happening. Can you imagine a secretary taking a letter without a dictaphone or pad of paper and pencil? Her boss is rattling off a letter and then asks, "Did you get that?" She says, "Sure." He asks, "Where is it?" She replies, "All up here in my head." He says, "Okay, give it back to me."

We need to realize that we need to write these things down or we will forget them. Satan then snatches the Word. We will leave without realizing the lessons we have learned. You may say, "I just take all of these notes and never look back at them." That is fine. It is better to write them down, take the notes and throw them away than not taking them down at all. The combination of the impression of hearing and writing them down makes a double impression on your mind. You have a much better chance of remembering the principles. If you do want to go back and refer to the lessons, even one out of ten times, it is there. Some of us need to learn how to take notes.

4- *We need to learn the power of repetition.* This is why I review the previous lesson or lessons through a general outline. I know it may be dull and I try to limit it to five minutes. I guarantee that if you remember anything, you remember the things that are repeated week after week after week after week. This is why Scripture tells us that we are to write these things on the doorposts of our houses. They should be as frontlets between our eyes. These things should be recorded on our hands. It ought to be everywhere we look reminding us of the principles.

How many of you take notes when hearing the Word? Of those who do, have you reviewed those notes this past week? These lessons should be as frontlets between your eyes. These things should be constantly in your view. Otherwise the enemy comes and snatches the seed and it is gone.

5- *We need to share the seed with another.* How many of you were blessed by last Sunday's worship service? How many of you have shared that with somebody else? When you share it, it is like epoxy glue that helps solidify. First of all, you help somebody else. Secondly, you have to think it through again. Thirdly, you have to review it. Fourthly, you have to apply it in some measure.

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Fifthly, you get to hear it again yourself while you are talking.

Every Sunday afternoon every husband and wife should go home and take the Word that you have heard and review it together. You can look up the verses together and discuss it. You may even disagree with something you heard. That is not unhealthy. You can get some insights from your spouse.

In small growth groups or friendship groups, you can share these things. As you do this, you can take more notes on what they got out of it that you didn't. You are building the seed so that it goes into the heart. Satan does not have access to it. If you wait three days later to sit down and talk about it, you may not remember what to talk about. Share the seed with somebody else.

6- Pray it into your life personally. As you finish this lesson, ask God to make His seed real to you, whatever it takes. Then hold on because He will. You may not like the way God does it sometimes because His ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. But God has a goal for you and that is for the seed of the Word to take root. Again, God wants you to ask Him to make it real. First, ask Him to give you some seed and then ask Him to make it real in your life. We are not here to assimilate facts. We are here to assimilate truths to be changed into His image with ever-increasing splendor from one degree of glory to another as Paul tells us.

This is called first person discipleship. Ask the Holy Spirit to disciple you this week. The Holy Spirit is the best discipler there is. The problem is that we don't become available to Him as often as we are to people. You may say, "I have a friend who is discipling me, and we meet every week. He talks to me and encourages me. He answers my questions. He gives me specific projects to do. God is really blessing me through that relationship." I believe this is a primary tool of growth as we see in the New Testament church. I also believe that the Holy Spirit wants to disciple each of us personally. We will become available to another person on a more regular basis than we will to Him.

7- Deal with the priorities in your life. Sometimes the reason the seed is stolen is because we are so busy and have so much to do that we think, "That was a great thought and God really did speak to me. One of these days I'm going to get around to it. But first, I have to watch my football game. Then I have to mow the

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yard.” We fill our lives with things to do. We then come back to church and we think, “That was a great thought from last week. I wish I had gotten a chance to review that.”

If Jesus Christ is the most important person in the world to you and if the Word of God is the most valuable commodity you possess, then nothing else ought to interfere with the seed of the Word taking root in your life. Nothing. If we are honest with ourselves, the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and the lust of other things entering in choke the Word and it becomes unfruitful. But this isn’t the way it was intended.

8- Memorize and meditate on key passages. A friend called me last week and asked, “How is your memory work coming?” It wasn’t going very well. I hemmed and hawed. The point is that we need to encourage one another to engrave the Word of God on our hearts. How many of you went through the series of lessons on meditation and memory? How many of you have been faithful to do it?

9- Deal with attitudes and activities that hinder the Word from taking root in your life. I will give you five of these activities.

The first is distraction. If somebody bothers you or there is a distraction as you are sitting in church, don’t sit there the next week. If you don’t have the same translation that is being used and that bothers you, get the one being used. If your pen is broken, get another one. Anything that distracts you from taking the seed of the Word in your heart needs to be changed. Satan uses so many little things. I was thinking this week that Satan uses tape recorders to distract me. If I am just listening to music, it usually works very well. When I start copying a tape or listening to a tape where the Word of God is involved, I have never seen so many problems. It seems the wheels fly off. The tape breaks. Distractions.

The second area is condemnation. Many times the Word doesn’t take root because we find something in the deliverer or the message that we don’t approve of or don’t agree with. Instead of being open to the rest of the message, we immediately begin the process of judging.

The third reason is busyness. There are so many things to do. We are busy, busy Christians. There are so many things to do that we do not have time for the Word to get grounded in our lives.

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The fourth area is idleness. We are specifically told in the Scripture that idleness was a tool of Satan in the early church. It was for that reason that some of the young widows were encouraged to get married again so that they would have something to do. Apathy. Some of us just really don't care. We need to deal with that.

The fifth area is unfaithfulness in doing the other things listed above.

In closing, the Word of God is being scattered all over the world. Satan's goals are clearly defined. He wants to steal, kill or destroy the Word of God. He wants to steal the seed, kill the roots or destroy the fruits. He wants to snatch it up, bring affliction in our lives to test it or divert us from allowing it to bear fruit. Our first responsibility is to deal with the enemy at the point of keeping intact the seed we have received. In other words, we need to see that the Word of God stays where it is put. Write it down. Go over it together with someone. Review it and meditate on it. Deal with it and share it with other people until it becomes bedrock truth in our lives. What a joy it will be when the enemy swoops down to snatch away the seed and finds that it is already embedded in fertile soil beginning to bring forth much fruit.

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