



Finding Fourth-Soil People:
**Fourth-Soil Person
or Person of Peace**

« The only similarity
between a
Person of Peace
and the
Fourth-Soil Person
is generosity
and hospitality. »

The designation *Person of Peace* originates from Luke 10:5–7:

Whatever house you enter, first say, “Peace to this household.” If a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they offer, for the worker is worthy of his wages. Don’t be moving from house to house.¹

Learning about the Person of Peace concept greatly enhanced my ministry by giving me a specific target to aim for in the vast sea of lostness within the country I served.

The problem occurs when we inflate the biblical text; admittedly I am guilty on the topic of the Person of Peace. While the text limits the actions of the Person of Peace to generously receiving the disciples and extending hospitality by providing food and shelter, many missionaries expand the actions of said person to include the winning of his household, connecting the disciples to the community, and even starting a movement in the community.

In this article, I am not asking missionaries to dismiss the idea that potential community movement catalysts are waiting for sowers to share the gospel with them. Here I simply reassign the “movement catalyst” designation from the Person of Peace to the Fourth-Soil Person. With this schematic change, the idea of Jesus training His disciples how to establish movements appears stronger within the biblical text.

Person of Peace

In Luke 10:1–24, Jesus prepares His laborers for work in the harvest. He tells the disciples where to go, what to say, with whom to talk, what to watch out for, and what to do if their message is rejected. These detailed instructions do not represent the goal of the assignment; Jesus expresses the goal in terms of a harvest. The overarching mission involves broad seed sowing throughout Galilee. Within the framework of preparing the disciples for their mission, which did not come with travel funds, Jesus developed a plan that would cover their basic needs of food and shelter

by arranging a divine meeting between the needy disciples and hospitable people who would care for them.

Clarifying the role of the Person of Peace, I found Roger Gehring’s *House Church and Mission* helpful. Gehring refers to Jesus’ plan to care for the disciples as the “House rule”² that provides a base of operation for fieldworkers assigned to unfamiliar mission fields. A careful examination of Jesus’ instructions to the Twelve and the seventy-two demonstrates Gehring’s “House rule”:

Whenever you enter a house, stay there *until you leave that place*. (Mark 6:10, emphasis added)

When you enter any town or village, find out who is worthy, and stay there *until you leave*. (Matt. 10:11, emphasis added)

Remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they offer, for the worker is worthy of his wages. *Don’t be moving from house to house*. (Luke 10:7, emphasis added)

In other words, Jesus instructed His disciples to find a home base, then cease the search for more home bases. They were not to waste time looking for multiple homes while they sowed the area with the gospel. Is it possible for a Person of Peace to also be a Fourth-Soil Person? Certainly! When the area has been sown, travel to a new area and repeat the process; first find a Person of Peace, then again saturate the area with the gospel.

The only similarity between a Person of Peace and the Fourth-Soil Person is generosity and hospitality. W. E. Vine and Merrill Unger agree that in Luke 8:15, when Jesus describes the Fourth-Soil Person, He uses *kalos* (honest or noble) and *agathos* (good) together, these two words, when combined form an idiom common in the time of Jesus. The “good and noble” (8:15) idiom means “one that, instead of working ill to a neighbor, acts beneficially.”³ A. T. Robertson states the idiom refers to a “generous” person.⁴

A challenge occurs when pushing the meaning of Person of Peace beyond the stated text. The process of discovering Persons of Peace comes through the disciples’ appearance as

1 Scripture quotations are from the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*, 2009.

2 Roger Gehring, *House Church and Mission* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 55.

3 W. E. Vine and Merrill Unger, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words: With Topical Index* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 274.

4 A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1930), 2:114.

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persons in need (“don’t carry a money-bag, traveling bag, or sandals” Luke 10:4). The problem emerges when Jesus later revokes His instructions of going out as needy individuals (see Luke 22:35–36). Rather than imposing assumptions onto the understanding of the Person of Peace, the hermeneutical approach works best by allowing the Person of Peace to function as a home base while continuing the role of a sower in disseminating the Word of God through the community.

Many missionaries point to the centurion, Samaritan woman, Cornelius, Lydia, and Philippian jailer as examples of Persons of Peace. Each of these individuals becomes a believer and reproduces. With the Person of Peace description though, each appears more as a Fourth-Soil Person than as a Person of Peace. For missionaries entering into new mission fields with the intent to sow the field with the gospel, Jesus’ “house rule” offers a tremendous service. Knowing that both Fourth-Soil People and Persons of Peace are generous, the search for Persons of Peace could result in the discovery of a Fourth-Soil Person.

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Fourth-Soil People


Making the distinction between a Person of Peace and Fourth-Soil Person comes with advantages. The description of Fourth-Soil People appears more developed than the description of Persons of Peace. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus not only describes a Fourth-Soil Person; He also provides detailed descriptions of what a Fourth-Soil Person does not look like. His hundredfold portrayal of the Fourth-Soil Person gives hope of an exponential

movement influencing lost people in a community. Jesus connects the Parable of the Sower to the other parables through His statement, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any of the parables?” (Mark 4:13), we can use parables such as the mustard seed and yeast to understand that Fourth-Soil People may not be obvious people in a community.

A profile of the Fourth-Soil Person, according to the Parable of the Sower, includes the following: believes the gospel, perseveres and reproduces even when passing through a time of testing (i.e., threat of persecution), and reproduces regardless of the threat and distractions of worry, riches, and pleasures of life. Jesus provides additional information by describing the Fourth-Soil Person as a generous or hospitable person who reproduces (i.e., wins souls) at a pace of thirtyfold, sixtyfold, or a hundredfold.

Sowers do not make Fourth-Soil People; they find them through seed-sowing campaigns for a season. People often ask me how to transform second- and third-soil people into Fourth-Soil People. Although I believe this is a possibility, I remind them of Jesus’ Parable of the Growing Seed (Mark 4:30–32; Mark places this parable after the Parable of the Sower)—that our assignment is only to sow and reap a harvest. Efforts to transform second- and third-soil people into Fourth-Soil People should not replace broad seed-sowing efforts to find Fourth-Soil People in the harvest fields.

Conclusion

So which would you rather find among a people group, Persons of Peace or Fourth-Soil People? In *How Jesus Won Persons*, Delos Miles describes the social order of the communities among which Jesus walked: “The ancient *oikos* reflected the status order of that period.”⁵ Likewise, the *oikos* factor becomes apparent when a Fourth-Soil Person wins a hundredfold of his *oikos*, and their unshakable faith serve as the change agent for their community. The *oikos* factor may appear in the research of scientists at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute who contend that when just 10 percent of the population holds an unshakable belief, the majority of the society will adopt their belief.⁶ *Jesus’ Parable of the Sower functions as a first-century explanation of describing how movements develop in communities.* Lost people within a people group benefit the most when a follower of Jesus sows with intent of discovering many fourth-soil movement catalysts. 

⁵ Delos Miles, *How Jesus Won Persons* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1982), 244.

⁶ “Minority Rules: Scientists Discover Tipping Point for the Spread of Ideas,” Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, July 25, 2011, http://news.rpi.edu/luwakkey/2902_