

Lesson 8

Avoiding Distractions and Worldly Diversions

Staying focused on your faith

Introduction

Life can be hard, and it can throw many difficult challenges at Christians. Disagreements with friends, financial struggles, sickness in the family, temptations to do things we know are wrong—these all try to distract us from God's will for our lives. Since we know that life is a journey of faith, we expect these distractions to come, but it doesn't make them any easier to handle.

We also find ourselves living in an age of unprecedented abundance and technological advancement. While these advancements have brought countless benefits and conveniences, they have also ushered in an era where people are encountering more spiritual distractions than ever before. These distractions can have a far-reaching impact on our lives as Christians. They not only hinder our relationship with God by creating barriers of noise and interference in our spiritual connection but also slow down our spiritual growth by diverting our time and energy away from the pursuit of deeper understanding and maturity in faith. Ultimately, distractions can divert us from our ultimate purpose as Christians, leading us astray from the path of righteousness and the fulfillment of the mission and calling that He has entrusted to us.

In this Bible class lesson, we will explore some of the distractions Christians encounter and discuss practical ways to avoid or overcome them.

Distractions Christians Encounter

Technology and Digital Overload

The digital age, characterized by its rapid technological advancements and the continual presence of screens and devices in our daily lives, has ushered in an unprecedented era of distraction. We find ourselves bombarded by an overwhelming array of diversions that constantly call for our attention. Social media platforms lure us with their incessant notifications, enticing us to engage in an endless cycle of scrolling, liking, and sharing. Entertainment streaming services offer an inexhaustible catalog of shows and movies, making it all too easy to lose track of time as we binge watch our favorite show. The constant influx of information from news updates, emails, and various online sources can create a ceaseless barrage of data that fills our minds, making it increasingly challenging to carve out moments for quiet reflection and spiritual contemplation.

The spiritual danger here is real. James warns us of *double-mindedness* and being *unstable*, James 1.8. The problem instability is usually a process – occurring over time with its impact catching up without

warning. We must always prioritize our heart's focus on God, rather than worldly pursuits. *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*, Matthew 6.21.

As the number of distractions grow in our life, they exert increasing pressure on our time and attention, often taking precedence over the sacred space we should have for spiritual pursuits.

What quiet space have you carved out in your life for God? The Psalmist reminds us of the importance of finding stillness amidst all the concerns of the world in order to know and connect with God: *"Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth,"* Psalm 46.10. In Mark 6.31 we observe the example of Jesus, who told the disciples to *come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest*, Mark 6.31. Here we see the Savior highlighting the need to get solitude and rest, even amid busyness.

When our minds become cluttered with the noise of the digital world, there is little room for the still, small voice of God to penetrate our hearts. The continuous bombardment of information and entertainment can erode our capacity for deep thought and contemplation, making it difficult to engage in meaningful prayer, meditation, or study of God's Word. We must become more aware of the allure of these distractions and actively strive to create intentional spaces in our lives for spiritual growth and connection with our Lord.

Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things, Philippians 4.8.

Materialism and Consumerism

The constant pursuit of wealth, possessions, and a comfortable lifestyle can divert our focus away from God's kingdom and righteousness. Materialism and the desire for worldly comforts can exert a powerful pull on our hearts and minds, leading us to invest an excessive amount of time and energy into acquiring and maintaining possessions. This preoccupation with material wealth can be spiritually detrimental, as it can lead us down a path of self-indulgence and neglect of our relationship with God.

Jesus gave a clear warning about the dangers of placing too much emphasis on material wealth:

Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also, Matthew 6.19-21.

This passage reminds us that our hearts follow our treasures, and if our treasures are solely in the material world, our hearts will be far from God's kingdom.

Also, the parable of the rich fool is something that should give all of us pause:

Then he told them a parable: "A rich man's land was very productive. He thought to himself, 'What should I do, since I don't have anywhere to store my crops? I will do this,' he said. 'I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones and store all my grain and my goods there. Then I'll say to myself, "You have many goods stored up for many years. Take it easy; eat, drink, and enjoy yourself." ' "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is demanded of you. And the things you have prepared—whose will they be?' "That's how it is with the one who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God,"

Luke 12.16-21.

While material pursuits may offer temporary comfort and security, they should not overshadow our ultimate pursuit of God's kingdom and His righteousness, Matthew 6.33. Balancing our desire for a comfortable lifestyle with a deep commitment to God's purposes is essential for maintaining a spiritually vibrant and fulfilling life.

Instant Gratification

The culture of instant gratification has conditioned us to seek immediate pleasure and satisfaction, often at the expense of long-term spiritual growth. We want what we want, now, and that becomes the immediate priority. The desire for instant gratification often encourages impulsive decisions and a lack of self-control. Scripture teaches us about the value of patience and warns against hasty, impulsive actions driven by covetousness, frustration, or anger:

A patient person shows great understanding, but a quick-tempered one promotes foolishness,
Proverbs 14.29.

A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls, Proverbs 25.28 ESV.

Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city,
Proverbs 16.32 ESV.

We can resist the fleshly desire for instant gratification. In fact, through the Spirit, God equips us with power, love, and self-discipline. We simply must use it:

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound judgment, 2 Timothy 1.7.

Busy Lifestyles

Modern life is often characterized by a relentless and fast-paced lifestyles that leave little room for spiritual nourishment and reflection. Hectic schedules, filled with work, family commitments, social obligations, and the demands of daily living, can easily consume our time and energy. Amid these constant demands, our spiritual practices such as prayer, worship, and reflection on the Word may be relegated to the margins of our lives, causing a disconnect between our faith and daily reality.

A very serious issue we must consider is how all these demands are cutting into family together time. Family time can often be reduced to riding in the minivan together hurriedly on the way to the next event while scarfing down a fast-food meal. When the event is over, everyone is so tired that the first thing that happens is a retreat into the bedroom where the kids catch up on homework and parents catch up on work brought home. Tomorrow the pattern simply repeats itself. Weeks turn into months, months into years. The family connection suffers because everyone has their own life and identity, instead of a *family life*.

Jesus challenges us to do life differently:

And whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Anyone who finds his life will lose it, and anyone who loses his life because of me will find it, Matthew 10.38-39.

Christ is worth giving up everything for. Do we believe this? Will we make sacrifices for what is *really* important? One day our season of busyness will be a distant memory and what was thought to be

important will be realized as not essential at all. By recognizing the importance of prioritizing moments for prayer, worship, and reflection, we can seek to restore balance and ensure that our faith remains central amid our busy schedules. These moments of spiritual connection can serve as anchors that ground us in our relationship with God, providing strength, peace, and guidance amidst life's demands.

Negative Influences

How much information are we taking in that is not spiritually wholesome? Are there people we choose to associate with who do not share a biblical worldview? Are these negative influences leading you toward temptation and compromise?

It is extremely important that we carefully consider what we are absorbing. The sheer volume of information available, online, and offline, guarantees that not everything we encounter is spiritually wholesome. Philippians 4:8 encourages us to filter our thoughts and focus on what aligns with God's values and virtues. In fact, Paul challenges us to assess whether the information we are receiving is edifying to our faith and whether it promotes values that align with the biblical worldview.

Another important aspect of maintaining a strong spiritual foundation is the company we keep.

Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals," 1 Corinthians 15:33.

Our associations and relationships can significantly influence our beliefs, behaviors, and values. Therefore, it's crucial to evaluate whether the people we choose to associate with share a biblical worldview. Are they encouraging us in our faith and helping us grow spiritually, or are they exerting negative influences that may lead us toward temptation and compromise? Proverbs contains a great amount of wisdom regarding the impact of associations, emphasizing the importance of walking with the wise, Proverbs 13:20, and avoiding those who may lead us astray Proverbs 22:24-25.

Worry and Anxiety

More Christians are impacted by worry and stress than there should be. Listen to the conversations you're having... where you're speaking, and others are speaking. Many wear their anxiousness, stress, and worry like a badge of honor. No wonder we're having heart attacks and other debilitating health issues. Being overrun with worry and anxiety is not how God desires we live. Instead, he calls upon us to be stable ... resting in our trust in Him, Philippians 4:1.

Your spiritual stability is directly tied to who you think God is. A person who remains stable amid trying circumstances is a person who is deeply connected to God. This is one of the greatest challenges facing Christians living in our times. Many Christians do not have an adequate appreciation or trust in who God is. We often turn to other things to cope with difficulty. We look for quick fixes. We consult with the world ... we read self-help books; we get ourselves medicated ... we distract ourselves with all sorts of things. We get ourselves hooked up with sin.

We need to remember:

- **Our refuge is in Him, Nahum 1.7.** *The Lord is good, a stronghold in a day of distress; he cares for those who take refuge in him.*
- **He is our rock of stability, Psalm 62.6-8:** *He alone is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I will not be shaken. My salvation and glory depend on God, my strong rock. My refuge is in God. Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts before him. God is our refuge. Selah.*

Taking “refuge” is not just a flowery phrase we repeat. We must demonstrate it by pouring out our hearts before Him. Are you a person of prayer and supplication?

- **Our rejoicing is “in the Lord,” Philippians 4.4:** *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*

No matter how bad your circumstances are, you can always rejoice in the Lord.

Navigating Spiritual Distractions

Intentional Time Management

Does your daily schedule include time for spiritual nourishment? How are you prioritizing God in your daily routine? Set aside time each day for prayer, worship, and scripture.

Digital Detox

Do you have moments in your day where you turn off the screens and disconnect from the digital world to find solitude and quietness? What boundaries have you set to prevent technology from becoming a distraction?

Fight Back Against Materialism

How are you cultivating contentment in Christ? Paul spoke of this:

I don't say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself. I know how to make do with little, and I know how to make do with a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need, Philippians 4.11-12.

Learn to focus on spiritual wealth rather than material possessions, Luke 12.33-34. Our ultimate allegiance and focus should be on God's kingdom and righteousness, rather than accumulating material wealth on earth.

Choose Your Company Wisely

Surround yourself with fellow Christians who will encourage you and support your faith. Be a positive influence on those around you, sharing the love and truth of Christ, 1 Thessalonians 5.11.

Cast your cares on God

When worries and anxieties come, pray and cast your burden upon the Lord, 1 Peter 5.7. Trust in His care and provision.

Renew Your Mind

Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God, Romans 12.2.

Renew your mind through the Word of God. Regularly study the Bible to gain a biblical perspective on life's distractions.

Conclusion

As Christians, we are called to remain steadfast in our faith, despite the distractions and diversions that the world presents. By prioritizing God, simplifying our lives, setting aside quiet time, choosing our company wisely, casting our cares on God, seeking accountability, and renewing our minds, we can overcome these distractions and grow closer to God in the process. Remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:33: *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

For Discussion:

1. How do distractions such as technology and digital overload affect your daily life and spiritual well-being? Have you found effective strategies to manage them?
2. In what ways have you personally experienced the tension between pursuing material wealth and prioritizing God's kingdom and righteousness, as mentioned in Matthew 6:19-21?
3. Can you share an example of a moment when instant gratification led you away from long-term spiritual growth? How did you handle that situation, and what did you learn from it?
4. How do you create intentional spaces in your life for spiritual growth and connection with God, especially amid busy schedules and constant distractions?
5. What steps can you take to ensure that the information you consume is spiritually wholesome and aligns with a biblical worldview, as encouraged in Philippians 4:8?

6. How have your associations and relationships influenced your beliefs, behaviors, and values? Are there any negative influences in your life that may be leading you toward temptation and compromise?

7. Share your thoughts on the impact of worry and anxiety on your spiritual stability. What strategies do you employ to maintain stability and trust in God during challenging circumstances?

8. What role does intentional time management play in your daily routine for spiritual nourishment, prayer, worship, and scripture study? How can you improve in this area?

9. Have you ever implemented a "digital detox" in your life to disconnect from the digital world and find solitude? How did it affect your spiritual well-being?

10. How can you actively cultivate contentment in Christ and focus on spiritual wealth rather than material possessions, as encouraged in Luke 12:33-34 and Philippians 4:11-12?