



The Distracted Heart
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The Crossing Church
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OPENING

This week we are continuing our series called **Dirt**. The complete series Scripture is **Mark 4:1-20** which is called the **Parable of the Soils or Sower or the Seed**. It is about four types of soil which represent the condition of our hearts and how we grow or are or hindered, personally and spiritually, as a result. In each of four weeks we are unpacking one of the four. This week's study is called **The Distracted Heart** and what we are going to see is that thorns or weeds can threaten the work God wants to do in us and through us for His Kingdom

SCRIPTURE¹

Mark 4:3-7 Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain.

Mark 4:15-19 (The Message) Some people are like the seed that falls on the hardened soil of the road. No sooner do they hear the Word than Satan snatches away what has been planted in them. And some are like the seed that lands in the gravel. When they first hear the Word, they respond with great enthusiasm. But there is such shallow soil of character that when the emotions wear off and some difficulty arrives, there is nothing to show for it. The seed cast in the weeds represents the ones who hear the kingdom news but are overwhelmed with worries about all the things they have to do and all the things they want to get. The stress strangles what they heard, and nothing comes of it.

Matthew 6:24 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 Whoever loves money never has enough, whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless.

Luke 8:14 The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture referenced here is NIV

OBSERVATION

Jesus loved to teach in parables. He told this story in Mark's Chapter 4 in an agrarian setting where His audience well understood what four types of soil were like. Jesus may have told this story while watching a farmer sow seed in his field - the audience understood how difficult that could be. A good farmer doesn't cause the seed to grow, he just creates the conditions in which the seed can flourish. In this metaphor, God is the sower and the seed represents the Word of God. God's Word does not change – what changes is the soil. The point of the story is that God sows His Word in the soil of our hearts.

QUESTION: Other than this parable, what other parables that Jesus told do you remember? Which one impacted you in the greatest way?

APPLICATION

We may be followers of Jesus trying to grow in our faith. We might be serving in our church or community, or in a small group, but if we aren't paying attention to the condition of our hearts, there are some thorns or weeds that can creep in and start to choke out our faith – the Word of God in our lives. Jesus talks about three thorns that cause this to happen and make us unfaithful: The first is **The Worries of this life**. The pandemic affected all of us in some way and caused worry - even fear - to grow within us. We've lost sleep and worried about getting sick or losing our jobs or how our kids should be educated, or the direction of our country. We are living in an age of anxiety.

QUESTION: What is worrying you most today?

Let's take a side trip for a moment and talk about our brains and the role they play in this discussion. Our brains have four basic brain waves: **A) Delta** which is sleep; **B) Theta** which is deep relaxation – that drowsy feeling right before we fall asleep; **C) Alpha** when our minds are concentrating but without tension; **D) Beta** which causes agitation, anxiety, fear or discontentment. In every moment of our days our brain functions in one of these areas. We were designed to function in Alpha and then move into Beta when necessary. We are instead in a high alert status because of social networking, the news cycle and the internet which result in us being constantly in the Beta state of worry and stress. So many people walk away from our faith during this season, but Jesus says, "Don't let the worries of this life choke out God's work in us."

QUESTION: Of the Alpha and Beta brain waves, which one takes the majority of your time each day?

The second of three thorns is: The Deceitfulness of Wealth. We instinctively know that money doesn't make us happy, but we want to try and see if it does. We tell ourselves that if it's our paycheck, or bank account, or inheritance – then it's ours! That attitude easily turns to greed but greed has nothing to do with the amount of money or other forms of wealth we have. We can just as easily be greedy and poor; or greedy and rich; or comfortably in the middle and still greedy. No matter how much money we make it never seems to be enough - it's a moving target we can never seem to achieve. The irony is that the more money we make, the less we give.

QUESTION: How much money do you want to earn? What would you buy if you earned that amount?

QUESTION: We think we will be more generous if we earned more. Where would you give if you earned more?

The third thorn of distraction is: The Desire for Other Things. The Greek word for desire literally means craving, longing, the "forbidden". These are things that are outside of God's design for us such as sexual pleasure outside of marriage. Also, we can be buried by distractions. The average Millennial spends nine hours a day on their phones and the average American spent thirteen hundred hours last year on social media. Compare that to the forty or fifty hours we might have spent in church during that year.

QUESTION: What is distracting you from studying God's Word today?

These thorns or weeds are all distractions, choking out God and His Word and work. They are a sign of spiritual immaturity that is not related to physical age. Grown men can be immature and high school students can demonstrate amazing maturity so it has nothing - it is the choking brought on by distractions.

QUESTION: How do you rate your level of spiritual maturity from 1 to 10? On what basis did you choose that number?

QUESTION: What is distracting you the most right now - worries, riches, or pleasures? Why?

God is calling us to get re-centered by moving ourselves out of the middle of life's circumstances and moving God back to His rightful place – the All in All – the Almighty Father God.

QUESTION: What plans do you have to re-center your life?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we praise You as we pray through **Psalm 138²** and take the opportunity to be honest about what is choking out our relationship with You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

QUESTIONS

QUESTION: Other than this parable, what other parables that Jesus told do you remember? Which one impacted you in the greatest way?

QUESTION: What is worrying you most today?

QUESTION: Of the Alpha and Beta brain waves, which one takes the majority of your time each day?

QUESTION: We think we will be more generous if we earned more. Where would you give if you earned more?

QUESTION: How much money do you want to earn? What would you buy if you earned that amount?

QUESTION: What is distracting you from studying God's Word today?

QUESTION: How do you rate your level of spiritual maturity from 1 to 10? On what basis did you choose that number?

QUESTION: What is distracting you the most right now - worries, riches, or pleasures? Why?

QUESTION: What plans do you have to re-center your life?

² Please pray this scripture of King David's in your Bible