

CLUTTERED HEART

Small Group Study Guide | April 28, 2024

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discuss: : What are the top 2-3 things that hinder you from God's Word?

Key Text: *"Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain...18 And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." (Mark 4:7, 18-19)*

The four types of soil Jesus mentions in His Parable of the Sower represent four types of hearers of God's Word. We've seen the hard-hearted hearer whose problem was a lack of interest (Mk.4:13-15) and the shallow-hearted hearer whose problem was a lack of depth (Mk.4:16-17). In today's lesson, we'll consider the cluttered-heart hearer whose heart is described as thorny ground where a seed is choked to death (Mk.4:18-19). Jesus describes three different kinds of thorns that choke the seed of God's Word and prevent it from bearing fruit in the life of a cluttered-heart hearer.

1. The thorns of worry choke and kill the seed of God's Word.

"But the cares of the world...choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." (Mk.4:19a)

Worry, or "the cares of this world" (v.19a) is often the result of looking at our circumstances or ourselves rather than keeping our eyes focused on Jesus. Many of us have experienced these damaging consequences of worry in our lives:

- Sorrow from focusing on our past failures,
- Anxiety from focusing on our present circumstances,
- Fear from focusing on the unknown future.

The late Corrie ten Boom, holocaust survivor and Christian author and speaker, said it well: "If you look at the world, you'll be distressed; if you look within, you'll be depressed; but if you look at God you'll be at rest." The writer of Psalm 123:1 had the right focus: *"To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!"* For the believer who is tempted to worry, the best place to look is not at the world, at others, at our circumstances, or at ourselves. The best and only place to look is up!

In the Old Testament, Israel's King Jehoshaphat was concerned because three nations had joined forces against him. He didn't know what to do, so he prayed to God, saying: *"our eyes are on you"* (2 Chron.20:12). The Lord immediately answered and gave him victory. We serve the same God who wants us to look to Him: *"I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? 2 My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth"* (Ps.121:1-2).

Discuss: Why is worry is such an obstacle to God's Word having effect in our lives?

Discuss: How do these verses address worry: Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 4:6-7?

2. The thorns of the deceitfulness of riches choke and kill God's Word.

"But the...deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." (Mk.4:19b)

The consuming desire for money and the power it brings has brought down the lives of countless people, including many who at one time professed faith in Christ. Paul warns us: *"Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs"* (1 Tim.6:9-10). A heart that is crowded with greed and the desire for riches has no room in it for the Word of God. If God chooses to bless a believer with material wealth, he must be careful to view it as a divine stewardship and an opportunity for ministry.

Discuss: What warnings about wealth are highlighted in these verses: Proverbs 15:6; 23:4; Ecclesiastes 5:10; Matthew 6:19-20?

3. The thorns of desiring things instead of God choke and kill God's Word.

"But the...desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." (Mk.4:19c)

God's Word has effect in our lives only when we have first submitted our lives to Him. If *"other things enter in"* (v.19c) and crowd out God's Word, we cannot experience God's work in us or through us. The only preventative measure we can take to keep room in our hearts for God's Word is to put God first—that is, to give Him top priority over everything else in our lives. Jesus summarized this "God-first" attitude in Matthew 22:37: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."* This means that all that we are, all that we have, and all that we hope to be is totally invested in our relationship with God. We hold nothing back. In Matthew 6:33, Jesus says, *"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."*

Discuss: What was the problem with the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:4?

Discuss: What *"other things enter in"* (Mk.4:19) and distract you in your relationship with God? What steps can you take to put those "other things" in their proper place?

Discuss: How do these verses highlight putting God first: 1 John 5:21; Romans 12:1?

Discuss: Which of the three thorns we've learned about today from The Parable of the Sower do you struggle with the most? Why?

For Further Study:

Free online study tools (commentaries, dictionaries, etc.) at blueletterbible.org

How to Listen to God by Charles Stanley

"What Does the Bible Say about Worry?" article at gotquestions.org