

Strategies of the Enemy - Distraction

A man bought a horse from a pastor. The pastor explains that to make the horse go, all you have to say is 'Thank God!' And to make the horse stop, say, 'Hallelujah!' One day, the man is riding his new horse and gets distracted when suddenly he notices he is about to ride off a cliff. So he begins to yell, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" and the horse stops just at the edge of the cliff. The man wipes his brow and says, "Phew! Thank God!"

Distraction can be devastating.

Totaling a parent's van in my first year of ministry, small CMA church in Salem.

There was a high price for my distraction that day.

Someone once said, "I would be very productive, but I keep being distracted by two things. Anything and everything."

Distraction

Distraction is another strategy the enemy uses to keep us from being connected to our Heavenly Father and effective in our walk with Him.

Distraction = Shifting our attention from something of greater importance to something of lesser importance.

The enemy derails us when we are distracted from God. We fall into his trap by shifting our attention and orientation from the most remarkable thing (following our Heavenly Father) to countless lesser ones.

Distractions come in many forms.

- We can be distracted by entertainment, ignoring the most important things in our lives for the comfort of a movie, a book, or social media.
- We can be distracted by our responsibilities, tricked into being so overwhelmed that we become paralyzed with stress.
- We can be distracted by the future, constantly dreaming of the destiny we hope and want to achieve, but never take a step forward.
- We can be distracted by the past. It could be yesterday, last week, or a decade ago. It could be something someone said or did to you or something you said or did to someone.

Distractions can be tricky. Often, the things the enemy uses to distract us are not inherently evil.

- There is nothing wrong with watching a movie, reading a book, or scrolling through social media, even purely for entertainment.

- It is essential to be a good steward of our responsibilities.
- Everyone should dream about their future.
- Learning and growing from one's past and resolving past circumstances and feelings can be healthy.

The enemy uses all sorts of things to distract us. Sometimes, they are really good things, but he uses them nonetheless.

Distraction can come in various forms, but all distractions do the same thing: they trap us in unending loops of worry, speculation, and fear by **distracting us** from everything God has for us.

Distractions are not about what we are being distracted by; they are about what we are being distracted from.

Gal 5:22-23 (CSB) - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things.

These are the result of the Holy Spirit's presence in us. How often do we give up a life of love, and joy? How many of you want more peace and patience? We fall into the enemy's trap to distract us and to crowd out kindness, goodness and faithfulness.

It's not that all of these other things in our lives are bad or even important, but because they are out of balance, they keep us from something better.

In 1 Sam we find the story of David.

God had something better for David and a plan to use David for His glory and to advance His Kingdom on earth. In 1 Sam 16, it says that the prophet Samuel was to anoint the next King of Israel with God's leading.

God tells Samuel to go to a man named Jesse, and that one of Jesse's sons is to be anointed the next king. Jesse has eight sons. Samuel sees the oldest, Eliab, and immediately thinks, this is the one. He is tall and big and strong. He's the one.

1 Sam 16:7 (CSB) - But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or his stature because I have rejected him. Humans do not see what the LORD sees, for humans see what is visible, but the LORD sees the heart."

Overcoming distraction requires having God's perspective on our lives and not relying on our perspective.

According to Samuel, David's other seven brothers were all good candidates for the throne. But God said no to each of them.

So many good things, anything and everything, in our lives have the potential to become distractions. The enemy uses those good things against us to keep us from God's best. That is why we need God's perspective.

After getting through the first seven brothers, Samuel asks Jesse, "Do you have any other sons?" Jesse says, "Well, there is the youngest, kind of the runt of the litter. He's out taking care of the sheep." Samuel says, "Get him." They bring David, and immediately, God says, yup, that's the one. It says that the Holy Spirit empowered David from that day forward.

God is working out His plan in David's life but also working out His master plan to restore His relationship with His human family. Remember, it was prophesied that the messiah, Jesus, would come from David's line. God is working out His plan because Samuel had God's perspective and didn't get distracted by what he assumed was the right direction.

We need God's perspective to see our distractions.

David's story continues in 1 Sam 17.

In 1 Sam 17 the Israelites and the Philistines are gathered on opposing hills, getting ready for battle. As the two sides are sizing each other up, this happens:

1 Sam 17:3-11 (CSB) - The Philistines were standing on one hill, and the Israelites were standing on another hill with a ravine between them. 4 Then a champion named Goliath, from Gath, came out from the Philistine camp. He was nine feet, nine inches, tall and wore a bronze helmet and bronze scale armor that weighed one hundred twenty-five pounds. There was bronze armor on his shins, and a bronze javelin was slung between his shoulders. His spear shaft was like a weaver's beam, and the iron point of his spear weighed fifteen pounds. In addition, a shield-bearer was walking in front of him.

He stood and shouted to the Israelite battle formations, "Why do you come out to line up in battle formation?" He asked them, "Am I not a Philistine and are you not servants of Saul? Choose one of your men and have him come down against me. If he wins in a fight against me and kills me, we will be your servants. But if I win against him and kill him, then you will be our servants and serve us." Then the Philistine said, "I defy the ranks of Israel today. Send me a man so we can fight each other!" When Saul and all Israel heard these words from the Philistine, they lost their courage and were terrified.

For forty days, every day, Goliath comes out and insults the Israelites and God.

Another way our enemy uses distraction against us is this: When God wants to do something in your life, our enemy will present another enemy that is not the real enemy to keep you distracted from the one you are called to defeat.

In David's case, it is his brother Eliab.

David's brothers are at the front lines, and David is still tending the sheep. One day, David's father tells David to take some supplies to his brothers. When David arrives at the camp, he hears Goliath shouting these insults at Israel, and David says, "Just who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

And then it says:

1 Sam 17:28 (CSB) - David's oldest brother Eliab listened as he spoke to the men, and he became angry with him. "Why did you come down here?" he asked. "Who did you leave those few sheep with in the wilderness? I know your arrogance and your evil heart—you came down to see the battle!"

Eliab begins to question David's motives. Our enemy is trying to trigger David, so if he stands and argues with his brother, he will never even see his real enemy.

Sometimes, we fight against what we are supposed to be fighting for.

We fight our spouse; we fight our kids; we fight our neighbors; we fight in our churches; we fight in our communities; we fight in the places where we work.

If David allows himself to be distracted by his brother, he will never engage the real enemy that God has brought him there to defeat.

We all know how this story ends, but imagine what could have happened. If David had engaged with Eliab for the next two hours, trying to defend himself, he might have never gotten to the task that God had brought him there for in the first place.

That is the enemy's strategy. Too often, we get tripped up by an offense and spend so much time defending ourselves against Eliab that we never get to Goliath, the real enemy.

Eliab wasn't the real enemy; Eliab was the brother he was supposed to be fighting for, not against.

Some of you are fighting Eliabs in your life, and the real Goliaths are left unchallenged.

If we would spend more time fighting against the works of the flesh and the Devil, which are things like pride, selfishness, immorality, greed, and lack of self-control, and less time fighting against the things we ought to be fighting for, I would do a whole lot less marriage counseling.

I don't say that in judgment; I say that in love. I say that because every story in this room is still being written. Like many of you, I have often fought the wrong battles, but I know God is still writing my story. It isn't over yet.

We need to deal with the Eliabs in our lives the way David dealt with his.

What is David's response to his brother? He simply turns his back to him and continues questioning the other men about Goliath. When David turns away from Eliab, he is now in a position to face Goliath. He turns his back on the distraction and focuses on the real enemy.

Eph 6:12 (CSB) - For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens.

Sometimes, we need to step back, get God's perspective, and recognize that the people we are fighting with are not the enemy. **But some of us are already defeated because we are distracted—we are distracted by the wrong fight.** Some of us are losing because we are fighting the wrong enemy. Let's take a step back and focus on the real enemy.

King Saul hears what David has said and has David brought to his tent.

1 Sam 17:32-37 (CSB) - David said to Saul, "Don't let anyone be discouraged by him; your servant will go and fight this Philistine!" But Saul replied, "You can't go fight this Philistine. You're just a youth, and he's been a warrior since he was young." David answered Saul, "Your servant has been tending his father's sheep. Whenever a lion or a bear came and carried off a lamb from the flock, I went after it, struck it down, and rescued the lamb from its mouth. If it reared up against me, I would grab it by its fur, strike it down, and kill it. Your servant has killed lions and bears; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God." Then David said, "The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine."

Saul says to David, no, you're too young; you can't do this.

If you consider what is at stake, you can kind of understand Saul's concern. A lot is riding on the guy who goes out there to fight Goliath. It sounds reasonable. Saul may even seem wise, but David is not dissuaded. He is not distracted by Saul's words.

He **knows** what God has called him to do, and he **remembers** God's faithfulness in the past. David is way more concerned about what God thinks than what Saul thinks. He is not afraid of what Goliath could do because he knows what God has done.

I have had many people say to me about preaching, "I could never do that. I could never stand up in front of so many people every week and talk." My answer to them is, "Yes, you could." There was a time when I was very distracted by what people thought about me. I was worried about how I was perceived, how I looked, and how people took what I said. I constantly evaluated my interactions, wondering what people thought about me and always wanting people to like me.

What was my solution to that problem? I stopped caring about what people think about me—not in a “you can pound sand” kind of way, but in a “I’m way more concerned about what God thinks about me than what you think about me” kind of way.

Matt 10:28 (CSB) - Don’t fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

In other words, fear God, not men (To understand what it means to fear God you have to listen to last week’s message).

Fearing man is a distraction and a waste of time. How many countless hours are spent reliving conversations that you’ve had with people, evaluating what you said, and worrying about how you came across? I don’t want to minimize the struggle that this is for many of us, but I am convinced the answer to this distraction is changing our mindset. Instead of being distracted by what everyone around you thinks, be focused on what God thinks.

Our concern for pleasing God needs to outweigh our concern for pleasing men.

In the end, there is only one opinion that matters.

Satan’s ultimate goal is to make sure we are so distracted with other things, even good things, that we don’t create room or space for God’s purpose to be our priority. If he can distract us from the real enemy and distract us by causing us to become overwhelmed by concern about how others perceive us, we won’t have room to hear God’s voice.

Distractions are not always about what we are being distracted by; they are about what we are being distracted from.

Are you hearing from God? Do you feel perhaps He is silent? What if He is actually speaking to you and speaks to you throughout your day, but you are so **distracted** by the wrong things that you are unable to hear him?

Let’s be aware of the enemy’s strategy to distract us, so we can be **connected** to our Heavenly Father and **effective** in our walk with Him. Let’s do what Paul says to the Colossians:

Col 3:1-2 (CSB) - So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Question: **What are the distractions our enemy is using against you? What steps do you need to take to overcome distraction?**

