

Do you find yourself distracted? ... Well... you are not alone. A recent survey on *distractions in the workplace* found that employees experience an average of 77 distractions a week... or one distraction every 31 minutes.

These distractions included:

- Responding to personal communications (such as online chats, texts, and calls)
- Checking email
- Meetings
- Browsing the internet
- Having unplanned conversations with co-workers
- Monitoring children and managing the household

The problem with these kinds of distractions is that *they make a dent in overall productivity*. A study by the University of California Irvine discovered that it takes 23 minutes and 15 seconds to get back into the task once interrupted. Distractions can leave employees feeling disconnected and overwhelmed... as they have to make up for lost time.

If you are recalling your own distractedness as an employee... maybe you are thinking that your distractions were not that big of a problem. ... (You still got your work done... and you were/are such a good employee...) And perhaps you are right. ... But have you ever considered how great a problem it is... when we become distracted from our *spiritual priorities*...?

Sometimes we treat **THESE** as no big deal either. But they are! ...

... [ P A U S E ] ...

Your spiritual priorities will determine the decisions you make each day. Many times they will influence your behavior and how you treat other people. ... It is for this reason... we need to make sure that we have

**proper** priorities instead of poor ones... and that we don't become distracted from them. From our passage today... we will gain insight on *what is important to God*... as Jesus straightens out a crooked woman... and from it He tells two parables (the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the leaven.) ... And... of course... what is important to the Lord should be important to us.

We are about to get into (yet) another Sabbath controversy... where Jesus' *priorities* clash with man-**made** priorities. Between each of the Gospel records we see a lot of these Sabbath controversies – all of which demonstrate the same bitter spirit of hostility toward Jesus. Here is a partial list:

1. When Jesus sent a demon out of a man. Mark 1:21–28
2. When Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law. Mark 1:29–31
3. When Jesus healed a lame man by the Bethesda Pool. John 5:1–18
4. When Jesus healed a man with a shriveled hand. Mark 3:1–6
5. When Jesus restored a crippled woman. Luke 13:10–17
6. When Jesus healed a man with epilepsy. Luke 14:1–6
7. When Jesus healed a man born blind. John 9:1–16

Now we have another Sabbath conflict - this one happened in Jesus' last recorded visit to a synagogue. (We will see next week that Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem for the final time.) He went to worship at the synagogue "*And look!*"... Luke 13:11 says in the original language... "*there was a woman which had a disabling spirit for eighteen years, and was bent over, and could not fully straighten herself.*" ... .. Poor woman!

The phrase “*bent over*” is the word *sugkupto* {*soong-koop’-to*} – in the Greek)... which means “*to bend completely forwards*” ... “*to bend in the middle and be bowed.*” Greek scholar A.T. Robertson says that it is a medical word for the curvature of the spine. (Luke’s medical background shines through here). Luke was a doctor and it is interesting that he was the only one that mentioned this story in the gospels.

*The attack of an evil spirit eighteen years before* had bound her up like a hobbled animal. She lived in a posture of forced humility... her face always toward the dust of the earth... unless she wrenched sideways and peered upward like an awkward animal. ... She seemed to sink lower and lower as the weight of years pressed upon her.

More than one commentator made the point that the woman actually symbolized the nation of Israel – which was like putty in the Devil’s hands. You may recall that last week when we studied the passage just before today’s (Luke 13:6-9)... that I said I believe that the parable of **that** passage (concerning the fruitless tree that the owner of the vineyard said “*cut it down*”... was about **Israel**. That parable was demonstrating God’s grace. God extended His grace toward Israel.

So Luke (with very little doubt)... is being consistent (here) in the way he writes his gospel. He presents his stories event-by-event... by linking them because of their topic. This weeks verses carry over from last week’s. This lady is (also) a picture of Israel’s condition... on whom Jesus had a priority of showing grace.

### **Luke 13:10-11**

This woman was present in the synagogue to worship God. Notice her *dedication* for worship. ... In spite of her physical problems... this woman went to the synagogue to worship. ... It would be humbling and difficult to go to the services... but worship obviously meant a good deal to this woman... and she would come to the services regardless of her condition.

She walked about as if she were searching for a grave. (At times she probably wished she could find one.) And yet this woman's spiritual focus was **upward**. She was evidently a regular worshiper at the synagogue... because no one seemed to take special note of her.... Due to her infirmity it would have been much easier to stay at home.

This woman is in pain. She is hurting. She cannot even straighten herself up she is so crooked. But where is she on the Sabbath day of worship? She is in church! ... She did not allow her condition to become an excuse to stay home even though it would be difficult to get to the synagogue and humbling because of her condition. ... She made up her mind that she wanted to worship the Lord.

I wonder if I would be faithful to worship God week after week in the synagogue? Surely this woman had prayed and asked God for help... and yet she was not delivered. ... However... God's seeming unconcern did not cause her to become bitter or resentful. There she was in the synagogue.

Do you make *worship* a priority... (?) or does *convenience* make the decision for you? ... We find in this woman *priorities that should be in us.* She valued her spiritual opportunities and put the Lord first in her life.

## Luke 13:12-13

Unlike many of His other recorded miracles... Jesus ***initiated*** the encounter. ... The sight of her pathetic condition may have interrupted His lesson: “*He was teaching.... And look! there was a woman....*” (As I said earlier – this is how Luke wrote it the original language.) It was sudden-like (instantaneously she appeared.) ... Christ was aware of the woman’s presence in the synagogue and she had His immediate compassion. ... He noticed her... called her over... and performed a physical and spiritual miracle... freeing her from both the demon and the physical consequences of its presence. It took priority.

Ever sensitive to the needs of others... Jesus saw the woman and called her to come forward. ... It may have seemed heartless to the congregation for Him to do this and expose her handicap publicly... but He knew what He was doing. ... (For one thing) Satan was in the synagogue and He wanted to expose him and defeat him. ... But He also wanted the woman to help Him teach the people an important lesson about freedom.

There are several other treasured insights that we find nestled in these two verses that we want to apply to our own lives. **First** of all... we find the priority of Jesus. Jesus put the needs of a person over the needs of religious man-made traditions of men. He healed this woman on the Sabbath because of the need in her life. Christ was alert to others needs and we need to be alert, too. We cannot merely be focused on ourselves.

**Secondly**... just as the Lord called out to her to come to Him... our Lord continues that same call today for all who have needs. ... If you don’t know Christ... He is calling to you – to come to Him. If you have backslidden

away from the Lord... He is calling out to you. If you have a physical need of any kind... come to Him.

**Thirdly**... when the Lord called out to this woman... this would focus the attention of all the people upon her. This would have been humiliating for her... because she would have been the center of attention. It would also draw attention to her condition. ... .. This might happen to you – in coming to Him. But you will find that many times the Lord will humble people... before He blesses them.

Solomon stated in Proverbs that *before honor* - is **humility**. Humility is not going to hurt you... but your pride will. ... Humility will not rob you of great blessings... but your pride will rob you. ... [ P A U S E ] ...

### Luke 13:14

In this verse... we (certainly) find a *wrong* priority! The ruler of the synagogue is furious and more concerned about religious man-made traditions... than the needs of this woman... and the miracle that took place before his eyes. ... He would rather talk about his *regulations* than rejoice in the work that God was doing... in front of his face.

His statement: “*You could have been healed on the other six days of the week instead of today*”... revealed how cold and calloused was the attitude of this man.

When your priorities are out-of-wack... and your heart is filled with rage... bitterness... or anger... it is difficult to get your focus on *the needs that other people have in their lives*. ... How many times (though) have you observed people griping and criticizing others who are trying to meet

needs... solve problems... and serve the Lord Jesus Christ? ... They deflate instead of inflate fellow believers of their strength. They discourage instead of encourage. ... Please make it your spiritual priority to be an encourager. The church always needs more encouragers.

Notice that the man does not confront Jesus face to face. He speaks to the **people**. This may have been an attempt to gain support in attacking or his opposing Jesus. ... (Here's the thing...) so often we see those who try to undermine and attack God's servants use the same tactics. ... Rather than go to the individual that they have an issue with... they will try to rally a group of people... in order to destroy God's servants. Such actions are an abomination to God. These people are poisoning others with their bitterness. And by the way... ... Boy(!) does this guy ever have his priorities mixed-up...

The more you ponder his tirade... the more laughable it becomes. Suppose they *did* bring their sick to be healed ... Who would heal them? This guy...? Did *he* have that kind of power? He said to bring them any OTHER day of the week for healing. ... [ P A U S E ] ...

The protest by the head of the synagogue is surprising on a human level. Why wouldn't somebody in ministry rejoice to see a member of the community be released from a long-term physical burden? Why would this man **not** greatly rejoice to see God glorified in his synagogue?

The contrast between the woman's response and that of her spiritual leader could not have been more dramatic. She danced for joy! The woman glorified God - verse 13 says. ... He vainly tried to recapture his audience... which had understandably been swept-up in the woman's euphoria.

His lack of love for the woman showed that he did not love his neighbor as himself... indicating that he did not love God. The cold synagogue leader was about to be "*iced*" by Jesus.

### **Luke 13:15-16**

Jesus reminded him that he treated his animals far better than he treated this poor woman. ... Jesus and his contemporaries lived amidst a sea of regulations that allowed for the care of livestock on the Sabbath. Rabbinical regulations were very kind to dumb animals... assuring that they could be led out to eat and be watered. (The Rabbi's Mishna... in Shabbat 5... which is a book of their man-made regulations... gave this kindness to animals... while preventing the type of compassion that Jesus showed to the woman.)

Jesus pointed out the inconsistency of this ruler by addressing the fact that he will loose... lead... and water his livestock on the Sabbath day. That's work - so what is the difference? ... That is what the Lord is trying to get this man to see.

This woman is not an ox... she is a daughter of Abraham. She is much more important than a cow or donkey. ... He loosed her from her bondage... just as an ox was loosed. ... An ox may be thirsty for a couple of hours... but this woman suffered for 18 years. She needed help immediately.

Spiritual problems (however) are not on the priority list of those who reject Christ. ...They place more value on materialistic needs.



It is interesting to note that when a society rejects Christ and His Word... there is a tendency for people to value animals over people. That is a priority that is certainly out of balance. It is amazing how people today place more value on whales... birds... minnows... or wolves over the lives of unborn babies that are slaughtered in abortion clinics.

I sure saw this quite a bit growing up in the Central Valley of California. But I was here in Oregon in 2010... when California was in a state of emergency... because state politicians shut off the water to agriculture (the human food supply)... just to try and protect a fish (the Delta Smelt) from getting caught in some drain pipes. Unemployment rates went to 40% because of the water being shut off to the farmers. ... Hundreds of acres of crops were suddenly dead... shriveled... and turned to dust. One million acres of fields and orchards had no aboveground water supply.

People had to go to food banks for food. Fruits and vegetable prices skyrocketed in our nation's bread-basket (California's Central Valley.) The drought has caused an estimated \$1.15 billion dollar loss in agriculture-related wages and has eliminated as many as 40,000 jobs in farm-related industries in the San Joaquin Valley alone... and this is where most of the nation's produce and nut crops are grown. .... Why? The answer is because a little fish is more important than people.

When God's truth is rejected... people tend to be devalued. Since abortion has been made legal in America... we now find that euthanasia has become a popular belief by many people who feel that elderly people are a burden on society... they are of no value... and should kill themselves. It's crazy and wicked... but this is what happens when people reject God's truth.

Well... this was also the situation that Jesus confronted. The religious leaders valued animals over people.

### **Luke 13:17**

The crowds were with Jesus on this day. The synagogue ruler slumped away... the woman paced about upright... praising God... and the crowd rejoiced.... Kingdom power filled the air! The woman was free – and so were all the people – who saw the wrongful oppression of the religious leader.

Verse 17 (here) sets the stage for the rest of the passage (two parables that Jesus gave next). Jesus' opponents — the religious system was perpetuating evil/wrong priorities. But it could not stop the spread of truth... and rejoicing. ... In the two parables that Jesus tells in the next verses... He will explain that the kingdom of God will exist within a realm of evil. God's work was accomplished in the synagogue that day – in the midst of corrupted priorities. And the Kingdom of God will be this way... until Jesus returns.

### **Luke 13:18-21**

These two parables have been called (over the centuries) “the Growth Parables.” There are many believers who interpret them to be teaching us that the gospel started so very small... and seemingly insignificant. But with hardly any notice... the gospel has expanded and will continue to expand – until it completely overtakes the entire world. (And) this CERTAIN... but gradual overtaking will result in the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God here on earth.

There are so many believers that believe this to one degree or another. Obviously the metaphor of a tiny mustard seed that grows and grows... and the metaphor of unseen leaven that affects the entire lump of dough seems to teach this.

But World War I... and World War II... among so-called “Christian nations” caused theologians to rethink this interpretation. The world does not seem to be getting better and better. Evil seems to be expanding and dominating the world.

In 1945 Helmut Thielicke... the eminent theologian and preacher of the University of Hamburg in Germany... stood before his congregation in the choir loft of his church... which had been reduced to ruins by the air raids... and spoke these words:

We must not think of it as a gradual Christianization of the world which will increasingly eliminate evil. Such dreams and delusions, which may have been plausible enough in more peaceful times, have vanished in the terrors of our man-made misery. The nineteenth century, which brought forth a number of these dreams and dreamers, strikes us today as being an age of unsuspecting children.

Who can utter the word [progress] today without getting a flat taste in his mouth? Who can still believe today that we are developing toward a state in which the kingdom of God reigns in the world of nations, in culture, and in the life of the individual? The earth has been plowed too deep by the curse of war, the streams of blood and tears have swollen all too terribly, injustice and bestiality have become all too cruel and obvious for us to consider such dreams to be anything but bubbles and froth.

Like Helmut Thielicke... I do not believe these two parables teach triumphalism (the view that the church is going to gradually displace all religions of the world)... Instead... I understand it to point to the effective

growth of the church over the centuries... and the authentic transforming power of Christ's gospel... in spite of pervasive evil in its very midst. (This is what we saw when Christ healed the bent woman... and won the hearts of the people.)

Although many sincere believers (still today) think of the leaven in this parable... as representing the gospel... which will spread over the entire world and will eventually convert the world... I encourage you to stop and think.

Leaven does NOT represent the gospel... but a principle of evil. Leaven **never** represents good as used in the Bible. Leaven occurs about ninety-eight times in the Bible—about seventy-five times in the Old Testament and about twenty-three times in the New Testament. It is always used in a bad sense.

The idea of hiding leaven in three measures of meal would have offended any observant Jew. They would be repulsed and never conceive that it ever could be a picture of the church gradually influencing the whole world for **good**. ... No. As the recent experience in the synagogue showed religious corruption... Jesus announced that His kingdom community would also be threatened by corruption and impurity.

As for the parable of the mustard seed... we also must consider how it would have been understood by Jesus' original audience of 1<sup>st</sup>-Century Jews. (We are not free to foist our own understandings on it.)

Theologian D.A. Carson explains that a close study of birds as symbols in the Old Testament and especially in the literature of later Judaism shows that birds regularly symbolize evil and even demons or Satan. (I would add

that)... Jesus in a different parable used birds to symbolize the evil distractions that snatch away the seed of God's truth that we hear.

Therefore it is most likely that this parable accurately describes what the kingdom community became in the decades and centuries after the Christianization of the Roman Empire.... (As well as) in many cultures today. The prophet Daniel used the image of a tree to depict human government. ... The church grew abnormally large in influence and dominion... It merged with human governments and was a nest for much corruption. Birds lodging in the branches most probably refers to elements of corruption which take refuge in Christendom today.

(Listen!) I think our Lord was graciously warning us. He told us to expect Satan's corrupting influence in (and around) the church. And (Boy!) has it ever kept people from wanting to have anything to do with the Church. Talk about a distraction from keeping the right spiritual priorities! ... Yes the church has hypocrites... and it will until Jesus returns and puts down all evil and establishes His full kingdom.

In the meantime will you **not** be distracted from the right spiritual priorities...? ... If you are not committed to regular worship... change your priority. If you are not an active follower of Jesus... change your priority. If you have never given your life to Christ... change your priority.

In 1982, "*ABC Evening News*" reported on an unusual work of modern art. It was a chair attached to a shotgun pointed directly at its occupant. (Anyone who sat in it would be looking directly into the gun barrel.) The gun was loaded and set on a timer to fire at an undetermined moment within the next hundred years.

The amazing thing was that people waited in lines to sit and stare into the gun's barrel! They all knew that the gun could go off at point-blank range at any moment... but they were gambling that the fatal blast wouldn't happen during their minute in the chair.

Yes... it was foolhardy... yet many people who wouldn't dream of sitting in that chair... live a lifetime gambling JUST AS FOOLHARDY. They are gambling that can get away with their sin. ... Foolishly they will ignore the risk... until their inevitable self-destruction.

Don't make that mistake. Put your faith in Christ for His salvation and eternal life.