

How to Fight Distraction in a Distracted Age

Don Currin | *illbehonest.com*

Well, good evening everyone. If you would this evening, let's bow our hearts together in prayer once again and ask for God's help.

Now Father, once again, we pray for weakness. Why not pray for weakness when You've ordained weakness for Your strength to be made perfect? And Father, we would ask that You would draw near to us tonight. You know there is such a dearth of experiential religion in our day, and we want to hear from Heaven tonight, and we want to receive a dimension of truth that would make our hearts dance. I need You. Your people need You. Our country is a spiritual wasteland. We want Christ to rise and we want His enemies to be scattered. And we pray tonight that You might speak in a very definite way to our hearts that it would go deep into our hearing, and Father, that our lives would take on a whole different dimension of Christ-conformity. Thank You for Your people, for those who have traveled far and wide. We ask, Father, that You would give us a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord this evening. We ask these things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Tonight if you would, take your Bibles with me and turn to Matthew 6. Matthew's Gospel, chapter 6. I want us to look at a section of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. I really fight when I preach these days to not have my messages to come across as scripted. I really want them to be heartfelt. I want to preach under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. And I say that and also say that tonight I'm preaching out of the old King James. It's just that every year I use a different translation. This year I'm doing my systematic Bible reading and my preaching from the old King James, so if you have a copy of the Word of God here tonight, preferably the ESV or the NASB or the New King James, then I think you'll find there'll not be much change as we read the text from the old King James here.

Matthew 6

Follow with me if you would in the Word of God beginning in verse 19. Matthew 6:19. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven where neither moss nor rust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through or steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye. If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. And if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore, I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns, yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking

thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, they toil not, neither do they spin. And yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore if God so clothed the grass of the field which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought saying what shall we eat? Or, what shall we drink? Or, wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek. For your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow, for the morrow for take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

The Discipline of the Mind

I want to speak tonight on the subject of the discipline of the mind. How to fight distractions in an age of digital distraction. It's interesting that there is a portion of the Sermon on the Mount here that I believe speaks to one of the great needs in our hour. You find here that our Lord underscores the importance of keeping eternal values in view. And He shares, it's interesting, an illustration, an analogy of the eye. Once again, verses 22 and 23. "The light of the body is the eye. If therefore, your eye be single, your whole body shall be full of light. But if your eye be evil, your whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!" You'll notice the word "single" here. He uses it to describe the condition of the eye. The word literally means "well-folded."

Imagine with me for a moment I had a napkin before you. And I was very careful, very meticulous in folding that napkin. End on end, corner to corner, everything equal. And I folded it multiple times. It would be neatly folded. This is the idea of the condition of the eye. It is well folded. Vincent says, speaking of this word "single," that "it refers to a piece of cloth or other material neatly folded once without a variety of complicated folds."

But it's interesting, the opposite of single means multi-folds. Or, better still, unevenly folded or staggered. You see, what Jesus is warning against here is a mind that is divided - now, watch this - a mind that is divided by distracting care. Vaughan says this, "When the eye is directed steadily toward an object and is in health, everything is clear and plain. If it vibrates being fixed on one single thing, nothing is seen clearly. Everything is dim and confused. The man therefore is unsteady. The eye regulates the motion of the body. To have an object distinctly in view is necessary in order to correct and regulate action."

Now listen to me very carefully so you might know where I'm going with this. In other words, what Jesus is saying, what the text is conveying is that when our mind is darting from one object to another, it potentially could lead the soul into a state of peril. This is important. Someone asked Tim Keller the question - and regardless of what you think of Tim Keller, don't miss the illustration - but they asked him the question: Why does the young generation by and large have such a difficult time laying hold of the reality of God? He said, "noise and distraction. It's easier to tweet than it is to pray."

How Our Smartphones Impact Us

According to Tony Reinke in his book, "Twelve Ways Your Phone Is Changing You," we are addicted to distraction. Regarding our cell phones alone, he says, "We check our smartphones about 81,500 times a year, or once every 4.3 minutes." Now you may think that is a surprise. I mean, that's shocking. Is it really true? But consider this with me. It shouldn't come as a surprise considering that our calendars, pictures, work schedules, workouts, reading, writing, credit cards, bank accounts, navigating systems, news, weather, email, and shopping are all on these digital devices. The truth of the matter is, brethren, is that we are addicted to phones. And like addicts, we need hits. We need hits.

Now, listen carefully. In light of what Jesus says in Matthew 6 here we should be seriously concerned about how impulsively our minds are darting from one thing to another, from moment to moment throughout the day. You see, for example, we look upon digital distractions as an acceptable thing, but fail to recognize the greatest danger is what they are doing to our spiritual lives. This is significant again. Let me tell you where I'm coming from. Distractions of any kind if not controlled can waste our time, dull our spiritual senses, divert our minds from the eternal realities that are so vital to our spiritual well-being and eternal future.

Let me give you a scenario. Here is a Christian believer. He has to be at work at 8 o'clock. He gets up at 6 o'clock to have time with the Lord, to do his devotional exercises. But in route to his living room where he is to take his Bible and to open in prayer, he checks his smartphone. He notices that he misses a phone call from the night before. He listens to the voice message. Immediately his mind races to what he needs to do, what he needs to say in response to that phone call. And then he notices before he puts it down that he has so many likes on his Facebook account. And then furthermore, he sees he has a private message or two. What's that about? So he begins to explore those messages, and one of them is of a serious nature that demands immediate response. So what he does, it takes him ten minutes to formulate a message, to write it with discretion, and then to edit it. By this time, it's 6:30. He takes his Bible. He tries to focus his attention upon the truth of God's Word, but it's very impossible because his mind is constantly going back and forth as to what he needs to say or what he needs to do in regard to these things that he's read on his smartphone.

It is interesting that Tony Reinke once again in that same book, "Twelve Ways Your Phone Is Changing You," said that of 8,000 Christians that he surveyed 54% admitted to checking their smartphone within minutes of waking. When asked whether they were more likely to check email and social media before or after spiritual disciplines on a typical morning, 73% said before. Now brothers and sisters, you sit there and you say this has got a tone of legalism to it. I'm not saying that you're to go out and throw away your cell phones. God forbid! But I'm saying something needs to happen here. We need the reign of the Spirit in our life to learn how to regulate our cell phones so that Christ may be preeminent in our thoughts.

Warnings Against Giving in to Distraction

My purpose in this message is to encourage believers to protect their minds from the earthly distractions that draw the attention from eternal realities that promise godliness and ultimate eternal life. When I share warnings these days, I'm not just addressing the possibility of losing blessings monetarily in your life as a result of these things taking the place of Christ. But I am warning people that even something as harmless as a cell phone could ultimately lead to

such fatal implications as the loss of your own soul. This is serious business. You see, your exercise of yourself toward godliness begins with a discipline of the mind. Holiness is the fruit of a well-ordered mind. Maintaining mental focus on spiritual things is essential in our pursuit of godliness. Therefore, let me share just a few things with you briefly.

The Eye

Number one, from our text now, v. 22. Consider our Lord's analogy of the eye. V. 22, "The light of the body is the eye." Now it's significant to note that the word "light" here refers to a source of illumination such as a candle or a lamp. And it speaks of a casting light upon an object for clarity, for understanding. When Jesus says the light of the body is the eye, He is speaking of the eye of our mind. Throughout His sermon, it's interesting that Jesus addresses how the mind should function by stressing such things as the protection of our thought life from worry, from anxious care. Or the importance of striving to remain on the straight and narrow way, which once again, solicits the attention of our mind. The content of His entire message is filled with exhortations on the importance of focusing the mind on the other world.

The Body

Then there is the word "body." Once again, note v. 22. This has a wide variety of applications including the idea of a slave. Let me explain. It means that the body is governed by the condition of our minds. As goes the mind, so goes our existence. As goes the mind, the health of the mind, so goes the direction in our walk with God. If the eye of the mind is oppressed with anxious care, the soul is negatively affected. However, if the mind's eye is spiritually well, the light becomes a wellspring of blessing.

The Mind

Now here's another thought. The mind is vital to man's spiritual well-being. God has created the mind to provide understanding for a man's spiritual welfare, and listen to this again, eternal destiny. Eternal destiny. You see, just as our physical eyes afford stability, balance, and direction, so a spiritually healthy eye provides clarity, discernment, and godliness. It's the catalyst, friend. It's the thing that determines everything, humanly speaking. It's important how you think. It's important what you subject your mind to. It's important what you fixate your mental faculties upon. For this is the very thing that determines the outcome of our life and our future destiny. Once again, far more serious than what we glean in just simply reading the text.

Here's a second thing I want you to note and that is when the eye is single. Jesus said once again, v. 22, "if therefore your eye be single, your whole body shall be full of light." Now please note this. Jesus proceeds in telling us that the condition of the eye should be to insure a life that is full of light. Now what does this mean? The word "single" means ordinally or prioritized. Ordinally or prioritized. To be disciplined in the mind suggests to be free from distractions so as to be focused on that which is eternal. You see, brothers and sisters, to be single-minded involves pursuing first the Kingdom of Christ. That's what it all seems to culminate in is that exhortation: Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. So you see, to be single-focused, focusing on Christ, means that your whole body shall be full of light. And the idea there is your life is content. The

context is a warning against materialism. There are these myriad of distractions that bombard our mind. And the key to a disciplined life, a life characterized by contentment, is when we learn to fixate our mind, fighting the good fight of faith, in our mind's eye that we might lay hold of Christ and His Kingdom, realizing that all these other material things shall be added unto us. He will provide.

But notice a third thing here in passing. And that is the effect of the eye that is evil. The effect of the eye that is evil. V. 23, it says, "But if your eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness." Now once again, this is important. The first thing that we must do here is to define the word "evil." It means harmful, diseased, or malicious. And it speaks of a condition resulting - watch now - a condition resulting from multiple distractions. The mind darting from one thing to the other. It has no semblance of order, no semblance of structure. There's nothing of a single-minded purpose.

One commentator said this: "If that soul is debased by attending exclusively to earthly objects, if it is diseased and not fixed on Heaven, how much greater, how much darker and more dreadful will it be than any darkness of our physical eye?" Here's the application: As a diseased physical eye affords a life of hardship, a spiritually diseased mind's eye will cast a dark shadow on one's life. As a matter of fact, it can lead him into a whole different lifestyle of peril.

Spiritual Visual Impairment

I remember as a young lad visiting my grandfather. He died when I was 9 years of age, but I remember going from 5 up to 8 years of age to his home once a year. He had glaucoma. He lost his sight quickly early in life. I remember his frustration. The seizures of anger. He would fall. He would stumble. It was so disheartening and pitiful to watch as he would feel his way around the house. Think about that spiritually for a moment. That's what a multitude of distracting care does to an undisciplined mind.

When the mind's eye is impaired, the spiritual life is adversely affected. Control is lost. The spiritual walk is impaired. And faith is weakened. For example, James tells us in James 1:8 that a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. You see, the word "double-minded" is a revealing word as it is defined as two-spirited, vacillating in opinion or purpose or direction or perspective. Is that you? Has that been me? This is something God's speaking to me about in a very profound way, friend.

Guarding our Mind for Sake of our Soul

Here's a fourth thing. And that is let me underscore the discipline of the mind's eye. Because the mind is the control-center of our life, we must make every attempt to guard it against the flood of distractions that vie for its attention each day. It may be a broken relationship. It may be something in regards to a financial adversity. But it may be just these impressions and impulses and promptings and little things that just move through our mind at breakneck speed, but yet, are there long enough to distract us. Brothers and sisters, listen. It matters what your mind focuses on. As we have been reminded, the word discipline denotes order, intentionality, or strict regimen. Therefore to grow in godliness, we are called to a disciplined mind that fights distractions and pursues holiness and peace with all men. That's one of the greatest repercussions of broken relationships is a clouded mind. Those who walk the

narrow way to Heaven are narrow-minded because they have learned to reduce their imaginations more and more to a single purpose and that is Christ first. Everything revolves around Christ.

So here is the conclusion for application. Perhaps a very appropriate question I should ask right here at the end is this, and I ask you very honestly, as if I was sitting in front of you and it was just you and I and I was looking you directly in the eye. What's been playing on the theater of your mind? What consumes your thought processes? We come to the end of our day and somehow in our spirit we think, man, it's been a productive day. But when we look back, all we've done is accommodate one care after another and we have not secured the presence and the knowledge of Christ which is vital to fellowship.

Consider this, barren lives can often be traced to undisciplined people who waste their life focusing their mind's eye on spiritually unprofitable distractions. Therefore, listen brethren, brothers and sisters, in the wake of a world of distraction, it would do us good to discipline our mind for the purpose of godly thinking.

Some Final Guidelines

The following are a few guidelines that I've taken from Christ's warnings here in the Sermon on the Mount. Listen carefully. Let me give you these four exhortations quickly. This is the conclusion. Number one, learn to invest your life, your resources, your time, and your money in eternity. Why is this important? Look once again at v. 20. "Lay up for yourselves..." In the context, this is what He's saying. "Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven." Why is this important? Because the mind that runs from one earthly care to another is the product of not investing in the other world. Our whole life is spent, your resources, the hours of your day, your finances, you lay up in this life and no wonder your mind goes to those things. Whereas if you were to invest them in the other world, in eternity, listen friend, they're there in the hands of a Savior for safe keeping, therefore, I don't have to worry about those things. Do you see that? The more we invest in the eternal, the less we care about this world.

Secondly, learn to fight distractions to maximize focus on what's most important. Learn to fight distractions. Don't sit idly by. Don't let your mind wander. But discipline your mind to focus on that which is of paramount importance. This is important once again. Jesus said in v. 22, "If therefore your eye be single, the whole body shall be full of light." And it's interesting in that passage in Colossians 3:2, he says "Set your mind on things above, not on things of this earth." You know what that word "set" there means? It means to forcibly fixate. And it takes effort. But it's interesting in the context there, do you know what it gives us the incentive to do? To kill sin. Because he says only three verses later it's a continuous thought - "therefore mortify your members which are upon the earth." The great incentive to kill sin is to focus on the eternal.

Thirdly, guard the mind against unnecessary care. Have you noticed in the context that I read a moment ago in our overall context, three times Christ says, "take no thought..." Let me stir up your mind by way of remembrance. You'll notice in v. 25, "Therefore, I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. V. 31, "Therefore take no thought saying what shall we eat or what shall we drink

or wherewithal shall we be clothed." V. 34, "Therefore take no thought for the morrow." Don't be anxious. Don't be anxious. Guard the mind against distracting care.

But then fourthly, here's another exhortation of grace. Cultivate a single-minded focus. Learn to cultivate a single-minded focus. Christ says once again it all comes together, it's all this summation statement right here, "But seek ye first the Kingdom of God," like we needed any reminder. It's what He's been talking about. So what does this mean? Let me encourage you with this. The best thing to do in cultivating a single-minded attitude, perspective - don't miss this now - you have got to learn to think biblically. Don't think with your feelings. And don't let yourself talk to you. And don't see the aid of people that are very sympathetic, that pity you. If you subject yourself to other people at all, subject yourself to spiritually-minded, biblically driven people that will encourage you to think biblically. This can't help but breed a single-minded focus. I must think biblically. Immersing the mind in Scripture - listen, inclines us to obtain a single-minded focus and discipline ourselves toward godliness. Brothers and sisters, listen carefully. This is the fruit of that wholeness that assures us of Heaven. Heaven is at stake here. It's not the loss of some reward or the forfeiture of some blessing. Heaven is at stake here. So in an age of relentless distraction, it calls for a fight of faith to set the mind, forcibly fixate the mind on things above.

Closing Prayer

Let's pray together. So Father, I pray tonight that You would help us. Lord, I know that the very tone of my voice and my spirit and even the words that I have used have conveyed sort of a negativism, but yet Lord, this is a warning of extraordinary mercy. It's a mercy for us all, Lord. If we do not persevere in the discipline of our mind, we'll perish. So help us, Lord, to take every precaution, to rely upon Your Holy Spirit, to seek the mind of our Savior, to lay hold of Your promises, to guard our mind from distracting care that we might lay hold of Christ and the ultimate outcome: eternal life. We ask these things in Christ's strong name, Amen.