



Ears Up-Part 2

A Grueling Spiritual Battle

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Well, if you were in any way familiar with the north side of Chicago, anywhere from the late '60s to the mid '90s, then the words Cabrini-Green should send a shiver up your spine. It was one of those notoriously violent housing projects, not only in Chicago, but in the entire United States. It wasn't unusual for some of the gang members to take over upper floors of the high-rise housing tract there in one of the high-rise tenements, to then perch themselves like snipers on those top windows and just start shooting people—picking people off in the neighborhood they didn't want in there. It was horrible.

By the way, remember back in the '70s, that show *Good Times*? Young people, you can tune out for a minute. Talk to my peers—*from a good time never good*. Jimmie Walker—"Dy-no-mite!" Remember that guy? Half of you... The opening credits of that, when it flashed towards *Good Times* on the visual, on the back of it was the pictures—it would zoom in to Cabrini-Green. It was the housing project and, you know, showed the buildings of it. And I lived there down the street from Cabrini-Green for about three years in college. And I can tell you, there weren't very many good times going on down there. There was some dynamite—but no, no good times that I could see.

Having been raised the son of a police officer in L.A. County, I kind of intuitively could look down the street from where my dorm room was and see the housing project and just know instinctively: that is not a place I should be going. I just knew that. I stay away from that. It looks dangerous. You don't—if you don't wear the right stuff, you're from an outsider group, wrong color skin, whatever—you're gonna get picked off. You don't want to go there.

Now, I knew that. No one had to tell me that. But I had a new roommate from Indiana, a happy-go-lucky, naive kind of guy from Indiana. He loved basketball. And when he looked down the street at the housing projects, you know what he saw? Public basketball courts. So one day he put on his tank top, he strapped on his high-tops, and he got his basketball and he jogged down to the Cabrini-Green basketball courts. And he started shooting around. And about the time he took his first shot, the Chicago cops pulled up with their lights on, pulled onto the court, and said, "Get over here, kid. What are you doing here?"

And my roommate said, "Just shooting around, playing basketball."



And here's the question: "Do you want to die this afternoon?" the cop said.

"No."

True story—they put him in the cop car, drove him back to our school, and dropped him off. They told him, "Don't ever come back here again. You don't belong here."

Now, if you ever take like a self-defense course or some anti-crime class or whatever, they're going to tell you what you don't want to be is the easy target. You want to be vigilant. You want to know your surroundings. We've got criminals who are looking for the easy prey, the easy target. You don't want to be that. You need to be thinking. You need to go to the right places. If you sense danger, go elsewhere. You need to have your defense pre-prepared so that you don't find yourself a victim of crime.

And that is good advice—not just for, you know, new tenants of downtown areas. This is good advice for Christians—not to avoid a physical mugging, but to realize that when Christ called you to be a Christian, he commissioned you to live the Christian life in a hostile environment. And not just to kind of circle the wagons and be this holy huddle until he comes back, but to go out into, penetrate this darkness, and make a difference representing his truth like light shining into the darkness. He said that's our task, and you need to know it's possible and spiritually violent territory. You need to be aware.

First Peter chapter five, verse eight says, "Be alert, be aware, be cognizant." These are some translations. I would translate those two Greek words: you need to be super vigilant, because you have an enemy—an adversary—the devil, who prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

Now, as very modern, upstanding Orange County Christians, you may say, "Well, that seems spooky and weird," and all the rest. But here is a real promise to us as Christians in this age: that we are going to be the target of the attack of the enemy. Now let me clarify. I'll use his name, and I'll speak of him as an individual throughout this message, but you do know that unless you're Job or someone super important in God's economy, he doesn't even know your name. But he does have a team of henchmen,



of minions, that are going out to do his bidding. When the Bible speaks of Satan seeking to devour you, it's not him personally—it could be, but I doubt it. It's his army that does the same things in your life that Satan is wanting to do.

So we need to know this is going on. And if you live your Christian life like my roommate in college—as though everything's fine and cool and copacetic, and it's a peaceful world we live in, let's just go and do what we want to do in it—you're in big trouble. You are, see—a, let's just at least put it mildly, a spiritual setback waiting to happen.

If I said there are lions in the parking lot, so before you go out to get in your car, just know we have hungry lions out there that are roaming through the parking lot, I hope you wouldn't say what a lot of you might be tempted to say about this sermon right now. And that is, "You know what? Greater is he that is in you than he who is in the world. I'm fine. You know, I trust the Lord. I'm not afraid of those things. I'm not seeing demons behind every rock. I'm okay."

Now, I realize "greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." I believe that. But just because there is a God who is stronger than our enemy doesn't mean you would walk to your car with a physical lion without a lot of vigilance and care and strategy. Same is true in the Christian life.

Now our passage—you're saying, how does this relate to our passage? We started studying last week in Luke chapter eight. We started there in verse four. Last week we stayed through verse 10. Today we pick up in verse 11. And you remember, if you were here last time, this is the parable of the soils. We looked at the setting for it, where the sower goes out and he throws his seed on four different kinds of land: the hard-packed dirt, the path; you had the shallow dirt with rock underneath it, so it couldn't sustain the growth; and then you had the thorny soil; then you had the good soil. Those four soils were representing an encounter of the Word of God with four different kinds of people.

We looked at the God's side of this equation last week, you might remember. Like I like to say, it's the other side of the tapestry—how God sees this and how God orchestrates this. It's a bit of a difficult thing for us to think through, but we dealt with that. But we're going to flip that over today, and begin in verses 11 and 12 to look at the first soil, the compacted soil, where we see here the focus being on the human side of it, if you will—not the divine side—but how do different people encounter the word? How, in some people's lives, is it effectual; in other people's lives, it's not?



So now we're going to see different factors involved in this. And the first soil that we're going to look at—verses 11 and 12—deal with a problem of not seeing the word do its job in someone's life because there is a spiritual enemy. The devil gets involved. We're gonna try and deal with that as best we can here this morning.

So I'd like you to turn there if you haven't already. And I want to look at this continually flipping back and forth between our role to present the truth to other people, and you as a Christian being the receiver—the receptor—of the truth being either taught to you, preached to you, or read as you open your Bible or a good Christian book that's presenting the truth of God's Word to you. So we're going to think on both sides of this. We're going to ask the question: why is it when I share my faith with my non-Christian friend at work, or my neighbor or my family member—what's going on there with some people, one category of people? And what kind of perennial problem do we have as Christians, trying to be on the receiving end of the Word of God being presented, where Satan gets involved and messes things up?

Let's read these two verses together, beginning in verse 11. Luke chapter eight, verse 11—he's now going to interpret or explain the parable: "Now the parable is this: The seed"—remember this, the parable is sower is going out to throw the seed—"the seed that he's throwing is the Word of God, the truth. The ones" (here's the category) "along the path"—the hard-packed dirt—"are those who have heard." These are the kinds of people that have heard the Word of God. "Then the devil comes" (there's the enemy) "and takes away the word from their hearts, so that"—the purpose of that word being thrown out there—"doesn't happen—they may not believe and be saved."

There are people you care about that you want to share the gospel with. Some people you don't even know that you share the gospel with. And some of those people—it doesn't have the impact that the Word of God had on your life when someone shared the gospel with you. And what we're saying is, you know what, there's an enemy involved. The hostile territory of the world is going to be impacting the reception of the word when you present it. And also the perennial problem of when I, as your preacher, send to you the Word of God in a message, or you open your Bible tomorrow morning and you read it—there's an activity going on that often short-circuits the purpose of those passages and those truths, and it's all to be blamed on the enemy. There are other factors involved, as we'll see as we move throughout this parable, but this is the one we want to look at this morning.

And because the devil becomes the focus of this, jot this down, number one—let's take a few minutes to think this through: you've got an enemy, and you need to know who he is. Know your enemy. Who is the enemy when it comes to the context of us hearing the word or presenting the word?



Well, the enemy, when describing the enemy, has lots of names—lots of names used. We went through all of them, if you were in our Angelology study in Compass Night a couple years ago. But we were dealing with those names, and the top two names, the one that most writers of the Bible will use, is the word *Satan*, which is transliterated into English, obviously—just simply “Satan.” That word means adversary or opponent. Fifty-four times throughout the Bible that’s the name used for our spiritual enemy.

The word that Luke likes to use—and when we were dealing with the temptation scene in Luke 4, where Jesus is in the wilderness being tempted—Luke employed the word that he employs here, and that is *diabolos*, which is transliterated “devil.” “Devil” is a different description of our enemy—as one who twists the truth. He is one who obfuscates, who somehow contorts. He is—here’s how it’s sometimes translated—a defamer. Someone who comes in and says things, does things, makes the kinds of accusations that are twisting the facts, trying to lead to the wrong conclusion. “The devil”—which is very apropos for this context, because the devil, when he has truth before him and it’s heading to do its thing in people’s lives, he wants to get in and toy with that, to mess with that, to twist it. This is our enemy, at least his name is being used this way—used some 34 times in the Bible to describe him.

Now, I want to show you this scene in action where there is a description of Christ talking about him proclaiming the truth, and Satan—as he’s describing and diagnosing—being in the middle of this conversation, messing things up. And the scene is found in John chapter eight. We’re in Luke 8—turn over to John chapter eight. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John—right next door—John 8. Pull that up on your device. I have to start saying that instead of “turn there,” although I’m hearing pages turn—you old-fashioned people. You were the people that knew what *Good Times* was. That’s awesome.

John 8—now, as you’re turning there, I guess I want to speak to the three modern scientific people in the room. Listen, if your Christianity is a little too “mature” for things like the devil, let me make very clear how this works in the Bible. Let me just quote a couple passages for you. One of them would be Ephesians chapter six, verse 12—when there’s this discussion going on about gearing up for the tough, hostile environment that we’re in, putting on the armor of God, it’s called. It says this: “We wrestle not against flesh and blood”—you know this passage—“but against the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil.”

Now, if you read that and you don’t read it in the context of the whole of Paul’s letter, you may be thinking of apparitions—bumps in the night, weird sensations when you walk into the room at the end



of the hallway—“Oooh.” Because why? Well, because we’re really battling “its rulers, authorities, cosmic powers over the present darkness.” That’s a great horror movie line. That’s wonderful.

No, that’s not it at all. Matter of fact, that’s not the work or the masterpiece or the goal of demonic activity. This discussion of gearing up to do the things that God tells us to do—to stand firm in our faith—comes on the heels of stuff like this, the passage in front of it: “Hey, be good employees. Do your work heartily. Do it right. Work with a kind of work ethic when you do your best even when the manager’s not watching you.” And before that—“Hey, don’t exasperate your kids. Don’t be bad parents. Be good parents. Be thoughtful parents. Train your children up in the way they should go.” Oh, and “Children, obey your parents.” And before that—“Hey, marriages: wives, you need to respect your husbands. Husbands, you need to sacrificially love your wife.”

There are no ghostly apparitions, there are no bumps in the night, there are no creaks in the attic. There is nothing in this book related to the things that come to mind when we talk about “the cosmic forces of evil in this present darkness.” Why? Because they’re not interested in making horror movies. That’s not the point. The point of the demonic is for you to hear the truth of being a wife who respects her husband, being a husband that loves sacrificially your wife, being a parent that does not exasperate your children, who trains and guides and directs and corrects your kids—all of those. Satan wants to get in there, make sure you hear that, and you hear something just a little different that somehow gets you on a path to not do exactly what God has asked you to do. That’s Satan’s best work. And it’s happening every time the truth is spoken and every time the truth is read. We know Satan is out there to take the truth of that away from your heart.

Now, Satan is not the kind of person that will leave you with nothing—he’ll give you something. It just won’t be, as they say in court, “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” Why do you have to say that when you go to court? Because we know we can put a witness on the stand to say something that has truth in it, but it’s not the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It’s twisted. It’s a composite of truth and misleading facts, statements and ideas—even innuendos and inflections that will lead you to the wrong conclusion. It’s deception. That’s Satan’s defaming game—that’s what he does—he twists the truth.

That’s going on in this room right now, just like in this room right now there are electromagnetic radiation waves going all through this room that are carrying text messages and cell phone conversations of people all around this building. There’s—on those electromagnetic waves—there’s TV channels, there’s XM Radio being beamed onto your head, there’s telephone waves, audio waves, digital—there’s Wi-Fi. All of that’s in this room, and you can’t see any of it, but it’s real. And you could have a device that could somehow perceive it, somehow decode it, and you could say, “Well, I



guess we do have Wi-Fi coverage here. I guess we do have texts coming in right now.” All of that is real; you just can’t see it. You can see the effects of it.

And the Bible is saying this: the effect of the invisible demonic activity that goes on every time the word is preached is that someone sitting next to you can get it, understand it, appropriate it, and rightly respond to it—because God clearly has spoken through that word, that sermon, that lesson—and the person next to you hears something else, gets the same words, different definitions, doesn’t get it, doesn’t apply it, doesn’t appropriate it, doesn’t respond rightly to it. And the Bible says part of that problem is the work of the enemy.

I turned you to John 8 a long time ago. Take a look at this. Jesus having an argument here with these folks who are now trying to claim their pedigree in verse 39—drop all the way down to verse 39, John 8:39. They said, “Abraham is our father! Get off our case. We’re, you know, the children of Abraham.”

Jesus said, “Listen, if you were the children of Abraham, you would be doing the works that Abraham did. He trusted God, he believed God, he heard the word of God, and he obeyed it. But you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God.”

I love the way that Jesus—though he could speak as the originator of truth—here presents himself as a messenger of truth. And every time you’re a messenger of truth, or every time you’re on the receiving end of someone who’s giving you the truth, you can see that there can be a problem of negative, hostile reaction to the truth being stated. Or you can be like Abraham—receive it, process it, do whatever it takes sacrificially to respond rightly to it. “This is not what Abraham did.

“You’re doing the works that your father did.”

And they said to him, “What do you mean? We’re not born of sexual immorality”—little jab there at his, you know, perceived or whispered, rumored status of being an illegitimate child. “We have one Father—even God.” Let’s just hopscotch right over Abraham. “And let me just say we’re not just children of Abraham; we are children of Yahweh, the living God.”



Jesus said to them, “Hey, if God were your Father, you would love me.”

Why? “For I came from God, and I’m here.” And as he said earlier in verse 40, “I’m bringing you the truth. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say?”

Now, that’s a rhetorical question. He knows the answer to it. Look carefully at the answer, middle of verse 43: “It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.”

Why is it that you resist it? Why is it that you fight it? He’s going to describe the problem—diagnosis, X-ray—verse 44: “You are of your father the devil.” The devil is so involved and entrenched in your life—he’s doing exactly what he wants to do in your life right now. “And your will is to do your father’s desires.” It’s not God, and it’s not Abraham.

“The devil is a murderer from the beginning.” Now hold that thought right there in your mind—a *murderer*. Now think back to our text, or see it on your worksheet there. The goal of the preached Word of God to non-Christians is that they would believe it and be saved from the penalty of their sin. Satan’s goal is not just to mess around with the proclamation or the reading of the word, or your sharing the gospel this week with a non-Christian, just because he likes to mess with communication. It’s because he doesn’t want the good result of that communication. See, when you speak the gospel to someone and they respond in repentance and faith, they then are saved from the penalty of their sin. When I preach to you a message, if it’s biblically accurate and you appropriate it in your life, your life is going to bear more fruit, it’s going to be honoring to God, it’s going to reflect Christ’s character even better. And if Satan could get involved, then he wants to tear that work down. He’s a murderer. He’s been a murderer from the beginning. That’s why he was in the garden, tempting Adam and Eve.

“He doesn’t stand in the truth, because there’s no truth in him.” Oh—now we put an asterisk by that. There’s plenty of truth in his mouth. In the temptation in Luke 4, did he not quote the Scripture—Psalm 91—to Jesus? “Hey, throw yourself off the pinnacle with him; the angels will bear you up; you’re not gonna let your foot strike against a stone.” He’s quoting the Word of God. Why? Because he’s trying to get Jesus to do something sinful by appealing to his sense of authority coming from God. He’s gonna give some Bible—that’s Satan’s best work—a composite. But just like if you’ve got 90% truth and 10% that leads you down a path that deceives—well, then it’s not the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It’s a lie. “No truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”



But there's a good statement of the issue of what's going on. Every time someone speaks clearly the truth of God's Word—you don't have to get up and read the Bible in the workroom at your office this week to have this experience. All you have to do is talk about the sin problem the Bible articulates, the answer in Christ, the substitution of Christ on a cross, the issue of heaven and hell, and the difference that Christ makes. All you do is share some of that, and when you see people hearing—instead of the good news, they hear some offensive news—the Bible says it's because there's a spiritual battle going on here. You've gone to do something good. You've gone to represent a good message, and it's received as negative. As Jesus said, "Why do you want to kill me? I'm here to tell you the truth. Why is it that you hate me?" Well, because Satan is the one who wants to take the truth, turn it into something that is offensive, to lead people away from the benefit of the truth.

Satan is a liar. In the margin, just because it may have been a bit startling for me to take the phrase "there is no truth in him" and say, "Wait a minute—asterisk—there *is* truth," I just want to show you it's not the truth of—it's not the whole truth. In the margin, jot this reference down, because it's clearly said in 2 Corinthians 11:14–15. And I assume you know this passage—don't need to turn there. Listen to it. It says this (Mike Fabarez paraphrase): no surprise that Satan's best liars do their lying with a Bible in their hand. You know the passage: it says Satan—here, I'll just read it for you—"Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So then it is no surprise that his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness."

You do understand that, right? And unfortunately, naive Christians—they applaud when they hear anybody mention Christ. They hear someone talk about the love of God—"Oh, that's fantastic. He's on our team." You need to understand: when you're preaching the gospel to your coworker and someone else has been talking about a "god"—not the God of the Bible (as I said yesterday at our men's event), the God of your five favorite verses, some perverted view of who God is—then they're hearing the words that you say about God, about the love of God, about salvation, and they're redefining those because the truth has been twisted in their minds. You've got to know the spiritual battle that we're up against.

And it doesn't happen when you're teaching math, or, you know, you're teaching something like, you know, how to hit a baseball. You can have misunderstandings, but those are not fueled by the demonic activity of Satan, who doesn't want the good to come from the preached word. Satan doesn't care if your kid's a great hitter. Doesn't care if your kid understands algebra. In the end, really, what Satan cares about is whether or not we understand, process, appropriate, and respond rightly to the truth of God's Word.



You've got to know your enemy. We have one.

One more passage on this and then I'll leave this alone—2 Corinthians chapter four. That poses a particular problem for us in 2 Corinthians chapter four. The problem is, if Satan is involved and he's so powerful, he's getting involved in the communication process, then what hope is there for us? Here's a hopeful passage. Doesn't start with hope. It starts with a positive comment, but it gets to the same problem we're talking about here in Luke 8:12—when it speaks of Satan getting involved in the process of sharing the truth.

Verse one, 2 Corinthians 4:1: "Therefore, having this ministry"—he's all about preaching the truth, about evangelism—"by the mercy of God," he's got this ministry to do what we're all called to do—"we do not lose heart." Now, why would you have to say that? Because this is a disheartening job. You share the gospel with people; they don't respond. You try to help people grow in their faith; they hear one thing when you've said another thing. The problem of communication in teaching the truth—it can be disheartening. But he says, "We're not going to lose heart."

"As a matter of fact," verse 2, "we've renounced disgraceful and underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or"—this would be a good line to underline—"tamper with the Word of God." We're not going to play the game that other people play by saying, "Well, if you're going to have a bad response to that part of the truth, we won't talk about it. Maybe God wasn't serious about that part of the truth." We don't mess with it.

Our answer is, middle of verse 2: "By the open statement of the truth"—by the plain, forthright statement of the truth—"we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God." Now, there's a mouthful, but notice what he just said. When I share the truth to you in a sermon, I know, you know, whatever the message is, it can make people mad, they don't like it. Why? Part of it is, if I preach the word accurately, there's a spiritual battle going on in the room. But I'm going to—I should, at least in my mind, obey this passage—present plainly and openly the statement of the truth without tampering with the Word of God. And when I'm doing that, I'm actually commending myself and this truth to your conscience in the sight of God. Because whatever I say, if it's biblically true, has already been—according to Romans 2—etched on your conscience. What I say reverberates with that sense of unity with your conscience.

You say, "No, that's not how people are responding." Romans 1 says the problem is—the truth that people know, the truth that's evident in nature, the truth that's evident in conscience—people suppress



that truth in unrighteousness. You know that passage. When they do that, they're fighting that truth. And God then is letting them creep on into—or dive headlong into—the sinful things that they do. But the Bible says when the truth comes, there's something about that truth that gets back to the thing they're fighting so hard. It's one of the reasons they're so vehement and hostile against this when we speak the truth.

I have an advocate every time I share the gospel, and it's God's law written on people's hearts. Now, if they're already mad at that law written on their hearts, they're going to be mad at me when I echo the thing that they're fighting. But I understand that there is a commending of the truth and ourselves to everyone's conscience. And one day, God is going to reveal all that. God sees it now—it's "in the sight of God"—but one day it'll be revealed.

"Well, they don't get it, Paul." And he knows that. "Even if our gospel is veiled," verse 3—if it's, you know, they've got blinders on—we've shifted from the analogy of hearing now to sight—he says, "then this you need to understand: it is veiled to those who are perishing." These are not Christians. In their case—we're talking about evangelism here—"the god of this world"—capital G or small g? Interactive, 11 o'clock service—small g. So we're not talking about God, not the God of the Bible—same word (*theos*) in Greek; we're talking about a monarch or a leader, but it's a small g because the translators want to get you to understand we're not talking about the God of heaven, who has us praying that his will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. The problem is, there's a monarch; there's a leader; there's some thug running this place—the god of this world—and he hates the truth. He hates the proclamation of the truth. And when the truth goes out, if people—if it's bouncing off their forehead, so to speak—then here's the deal: "He's blinding the minds of those unbelievers." He's actively reaching out to toy with that proclamation, the truth in the ears of those people, to keep them—just like Luke 8:12—to keep them from "seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

Now, that's a mouthful—so slow it down and note what he's saying. He's trying to keep them from seeing—this is the analogy, but we mean perceiving and understanding—the light, the illuminating, helpful, beneficial truth of the good news of the glory—the *doxa*, the weight and the importance—of Christ, who is the image of God. No one's more important than Christ. Christ deserves our allegiance. He is God incarnate. And when you share Christ with people, they think you're inviting them to church. When you share Christ with people, they think that you're inviting them to sign up for some spiritual insurance policy. But you're really presenting Christ as the end of everything, as the point of everything. And they are being prevented from seeing that because of Satan's activity.



“Where we proclaim not ourselves, but Christ Jesus,” verse 5 says, “as Lord”—the one in charge of everything, the image of God—“with ourselves as servants for Jesus’ sake.” “Who said”—here’s the hopeful part (I said this would be a hopeful passage; here comes the hopeful part)—“For God”—now he’s quoting Genesis 1—“who said, ‘Light shine out of darkness’”—remember that line, “Let there be light”—“has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Another mouthful—slow it down and catch it. He has given us—he’s illuminated, given us the ability to comprehend—the light of the knowledge, the information, the clarity, the illumination of the knowledge of the importance—the glory, the importance—of God in the face of Christ. We look to Christ and we see: this is what my life should be all about. He did that by saying—what?—“Let there be light.” He flipped a switch and allowed you to get it and understand it. Here’s the good news: greater is he that is in us than he who is in the world. What does that mean? That means that in our evangelism, when it’s successful, it’s because God got involved.

Now, I want to elaborate on that, but I want to elaborate on that in the third point. Right now, I want to take a whole entire middle section of the sermon—sidebar—to deal with another thing that we see in our text that I think sometimes we run right over and we miss the importance of. Won’t take long on this one. But go back to our text that’s printed on your worksheet. I want to develop that strategy—to know what it takes to see the light bulb come on, to have the ears unplugged, to see Satan vanquished in the communication process, whether it’s in evangelism or helping people grow in Christ. But first I want to look at this phrase. Look at verse 12 again: “The ones along the path are those who have heard. Then the devil comes and takes away the word”—underline these three words—“from their hearts.”

Big problem. You’ve heard me elaborate on this before. I apologize for the redundancy—to safeguard for you, it’s helpful. You live in this culture. This culture defines “heart” in one way; the Bible defines “heart” in another way. Heart, for us, is some seat of our emotions and our feelings. We open the Bible and teenage girls create all kinds of memes and things for their Facebook pages—I’m not bashing our teenage girls, of course—but the Bible’s full of hearts and kittens and fuzzy things, and it’s wonderful. Why? Because every other page I’m reading about the heart, and what is heart? Heart is “I feel good inside about God; I feel something.” Heart is not about feeling in the Bible. The heart is not the center of our feelings. It’s the center of our thinking.

Let me prove that to you. After you write the second point down—we need to understand the battlefield. Where is Satan getting involved to mess with the truth and the communication of the truth? In our minds. It’s a mental battlefield. Number two: understand the mental battlefield. That’s where the



battle is when I preach to you, and that's where the battle is when you preach the gospel to a non-Christian. The battle is in the mind.

Once you jot that down, turn with me to Genesis 6. The word *heart* in the Old Testament—used almost 600 times. Close to 600 times. In the New Testament, the Greek word—much smaller segment of the Bible—about 160 times we see the Greek word *kardia*. The Old Testament Hebrew word *lev*—all over the Old Testament. When we see that, you cannot think of emotions. You cannot think of feelings. The Bible is not primarily a book about affecting and impacting your feelings. It's about impacting your mental, rational thinking, because that is what the heart is representing.

Let me prove it to you—very early reference to all this in Genesis 6. Now you remember the story—the flood—which is a bad story. It's not—"Oh, no, it's a good story." I mean, we put our little borders up in the kids' nursery of all the cute little animals boarding the ark. But if you kept going with that wallpaper border, it gets really sad near the end of the border because everybody dies. It's funny how that never ends up that way—maybe down the hallway, in your room somewhere, you have that idea. But this is a terrible story. Why? Because why did we have to save all the animals and his family? Well, because God was really, really torqued at the set of people.

And here it says—it describes the problem. It describes the problem as a problem that starts in the *lev*, in the heart. Notice how it's put—verse 5, Genesis 6:5: "The Lord saw the wickedness of man was great on the earth." So men are sinful. And women. People are sinful. They're doing sinful things, and there's a lot of sinfulness—wickedness. And here's how it's described: "and that every *yetzer*"—in Hebrew, it's translated here "intention." It's the idea of my purposes in my heart, the framing of my thoughts, the imagination of my mind. It's what's playing on the screen of the theater of my thinking. Matter of fact, it goes on to use another more complex Hebrew word in the next phrase: "the intentions of the thoughts"—right?—the considerations, the things that I imagine and think about—"every intention of the thoughts"—here it comes—"of his *lev*," of his heart. Every imagination, framing, intention of the thinking, consideration of my heart. See, the heart is a place where things are thought through, where things are imagined, where things are framed, where things are put together in my mind. And God says the problem with all the wickedness in the world is the problem of the heart.

That's so important. I want you to look at that because those words are helpful, but we'll see it all through the Bible once you start to look for it. And you've heard me explain this before: it's not that the Bible is absent of feelings, but the analogy for the feelings is your—excuse the word—but your bowels, your intestines. And that's in the New Testament—the Greek word *splanchna*. If you want to talk about compassion, or the feeling of something in my life, it's lower. If you want to talk about



where I'm thinking, it's the center of my chest—my torso. That's the center of my thinker—my *lev*, my *kardia*, my mind, my heart (if we're going to use the word *heart* in a biblical sense).

If we're going to understand the battlefield—both in the non-Christian I'm talking to about God, and every time you encounter the word preached to you, or you read a good Christian book—we need to understand this passage: Satan is active in the heart.

Turn to Ephesians chapter four, and let's camp there for just a minute. This is a short point, but let's look at this passage.

And while you're turning there, by the way, let me recall some familiar passages to you that maybe you didn't know the words were so focused on the mind. Romans 1—I've already quoted that—where God turns people over to their sinful stuffing of the truth. They know the truth; they don't honor God or acknowledge him or give thanks to him; but they suppress the truth in unrighteousness. God gives them over, and the first thing he says in that—here it is, I'm reading from verse 28—he gives them over to a *debased mind*. And from that come all manner of unrighteousness—evil, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, lying. All that comes from what? A heart that's kind of been unmoored and it's just off floating and it's gone—it's not going to think God's thoughts; it's not going to acknowledge God. Off it goes—what?—the *mind*.

Another one: when Jesus in Matthew chapter 15, verses 19–20—he's dealing with all the customs of men, not of the Bible, but of men and tradition, who want to wash their hands ceremonially before they do all these things. And he says, “You guys think ceremonially washing your hands is going to keep you righteous before God? You don't understand. Clean hands or dirty hands—they don't make the difference. Dirty hands don't defile a man or make him guilty before God.” But remember—he says, here's how he puts it—“It's what comes out of the heart—the *evil thoughts*.” That's the first thing on the list that leads to things like murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander—long list, just like Romans 1. Where does it come from? The way you're thinking—the things you imagine. What's playing on the screen of your mind when you're free to think about whatever you want to think about? What goes on in there?

Before we read Ephesians 4, let me take one more moment to say this. Some of you grew up in a Christian tradition of some kind that made you think that Satan can't hear your thoughts—demons and your thoughts—because only you know your thoughts, and so you are safe as long as you don't say anything. I don't want to be condescending or rude, but that's a really stupid way to think through this



issue of demonic interaction. I always like to ask people who have that view, “How loud do I have to speak before the demon hears me? Can the demon hear me? I know—I’ll say one thing, and in my heart I mean another—I can trick these demons out.” This is foolish. This is absurd. Why? Because me blathering on with my mouth, flapping off the inside of my teeth and all of that—moving airwaves—makes no difference to a demon. Satan has no interest in any of that because he doesn’t have ear canals with little bones vibrating, sending messages to his brain so he can decode my thoughts. None of that is necessary. These are spirit beings. They function in the realm of thoughts. That’s where they function. That’s where the battle is. Satan gets in and twists and contorts and defames the truth *inside the minds* of people. That’s where the battle takes place.

Jesus, as we saw in Matthew and Luke chapter 4 in the temptation—these are not things that had to be said to one another. These temptations are going on in his mind. These are issues that are of the heart and the mind—right? We use the word *heart* in a biblical sense. So maybe that helps explain a little bit of the battle you have going on in your mind so often—your thoughts, what’s playing on the screen of the theater of your mind.

Ephesians 4—look at this. Now, Satan’s involved in this arena. Verse 17—let’s start there: “Now I say this and testify in the Lord, that you must not”—that’s a great opening line of the authority of Christ—he says, “you must not any longer walk”—that’s his word *peripateō*—that’s the word he likes to use for the style of your life, the manner of your life—“no longer have as a manner of your life as the Gentiles do.” Don’t walk like they do. *Gentiles* is not an ethnic comment. This is a comment about those who have no interest in the lordship of Christ. They don’t love God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind.

“So don’t live like they do.” How do they live? Now, this is a good line to underline: “in the futility of their minds.” Something’s running on their screen that is futile. It’s ridiculous. Verse 18: “They are darkened in their understanding”—again, the analogy of light—they don’t get it. Their minds are not comprehending the truth. “They are alienated from the life of God because of”—here’s another thinking word—“the ignorance that is in them, due to the hardness of their hearts.” All of these words relate to my thinking, not my feeling. And it says there’s a calloused heart there. You throw the word out to your coworker this week—you want to see that person come to faith in Christ—the heart, the thinker, is calloused. And because behind that shield—which we have already learned is the activity of the enemy—there’s futility in their thinking; there’s darkening in their understanding; there’s ignorance in their minds. Why? Because their hearts are hard.

“They have become,” verse 19, “callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.” This is a lot like last week—remember Pharaoh hardens his heart; God



hardens. Here we see the giving over—God gives them over in Romans 1. Here it’s described as they give themselves over. Which is right? They’re both right. God gives them over because they’re giving themselves over to sensuality, greed, the practice of every kind of impurity.

“But you”—Christians—let’s apply it now to us—“that is not the way you learned Christ.” He’s talking to Christians here about not continuing with futility of mind, darkening of understanding, ignorance in their thinking. “You didn’t learn Christ like that—assuming that you have heard about him”—and now we’re talking with ears to hear—“and were taught in him”—you perceived the truth—“because the truth is in Jesus.”

Verse 22: “to put off your old self”—that whole manner of life—“which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through its deceitful desires, and to be renewed”—this is the whole thing that happens in your—what?—“the spirit of your *minds*”—another phrase to underline—“and to put on your new self, which is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” And the difference there is how God allows, enables, the opening of your mind to perceive and comprehend the truth. You cannot go back to acting like, responding like, thinking like you did when you were a non-Christian. This is a call for us—as we encounter the truth—to make sure we’re encountering it even as Christians 10 years old or 40 years old as a Christian—responding to the truth in the way we did when we first got saved, receptive to it, knowing there’s a spiritual battle going on as there is in Luke 4 with the temptation of Christ.

All right—that was a short point. Let’s go on to the last point. Here’s where I want to camp for the last couple minutes that we’ve got. Our passage, if you look at it there printed on your worksheet—Luke 8—is a parable about the throwing out of the Word of God. “The seed is the Word of God.” Now, it—in this text—doesn’t have its effectual impact because there’s an enemy involved that is short-circuiting the process. But the process of throwing the word in some people’s lives takes root, bears fruit—it does what it’s supposed to do.

Now, here’s the thing: none of this happens without the proclamation of the word. Paul makes that clear in Romans 10. We need the truth presented. So when it comes to this, my first hopeful action would be—whether it’s in my evangelism or whether it’s in my own life—is to... Now, I’ve got three subpoints here. Let’s just say the first one is the whole point, which is very short: we need to deploy more (letter A) **biblical encounters**.



I want to put more biblical truth out there. That's what can change lives. I understand it's going to be met with a spiritual battle, but that's the thing that can—and sometimes does—penetrate by the grace of God in the lives of people. It's a sword—living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, Hebrews 4 says—piercing to the thoughts and intentions of the heart. It gets into my thinker and it works. Now, there's a battle, and sometimes it's not effectual because the enemy is so involved in this—I get that—but I can't do it without it.

I picture that scene—speaking to old people about old TV shows—*I Love Lucy*, when they were packing those candies, remember that? (I saw reruns, right? I actually watched TV as a kid in color, just so you know.) But you remember—it got so fast it became comical. All I'm saying is: the enemy, when I speak the truth, has to respond and mess that up. And I want to send as much of it out as I can. I want to make sure that I'm presenting it and presenting it. That, to me, is just a call to remember—when I'm on the giving end of the truth—keep giving it. Don't let up. Now, there's a point when non-Christians say, "I don't want to hear any more," and of course, with gentleness and respect, I can respond to that. But you know what? Until that time, I'm going to keep bringing it. I'm going to keep bringing the truth of God's Word. Doesn't mean I stand in the lunchroom and I just open my Bible and I start reading from Isaiah. But it does mean my conversation keeps coming back to the biblical truth of God's Word.

So—more biblical encounters. And let's flip that over—you being on the receiving end of the truth, whether it's in a sermon, or when you read your Bible, or when you're in some kind of home fellowship group or something, and the Word of God is coming your direction—here's the thing: let's just talk about today's sermon. You're going to get the sermon, you're going to get in your car, you're going to go home, live your life this week. The effect of the Word of God being preached in your life this morning, I want you to realize, the effectual nature of that is bolstered when you continue to have more biblical encounters. It's one of the reasons we put discussion questions on the back—and if you notice, every discussion question has you look up a passage related to what I taught on today. Why? Because we need to keep having more biblical encounters that drive this into our lives.

Here's what Psalm 1 says—just to throw in a text here on this, right? Remember how it starts: "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked." We don't want all of that counsel of the evil. "No, I'm not going to stand in the seat of the sinners. I'm not going to sit in the seat of scoffers." But "my delight"—here it is—"is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates at least for 15 minutes every morning before he goes to work, and does it again tomorrow." Now, correct me if I ever quote these passages wrong. Is that what it says? He "meditates on it day and night." Now, that's a Hebrew idiom for all the time—regularly, consistently—keeps having biblical encounters, where in his *mind*—that's the battlefield. You want God's Word to have its positive, godly effect in your life? Keep it coming. Picture that conveyor belt—keep it coming. And any of the impact that the enemy wants to have in your heart—man, he's going to have to work overtime if you're continuing to bring that back



into your mind. And the benefit of that—you remember how the next line goes—“and everything he does prospers.” He’s like a tree planted by streams of water; his roots go down; his leaves turn green; he bears fruit in season. Man, this is the kind of life I need. And the key in that text is the continual meditation on the law day and night.

And don’t let your yoga teacher steal that word from us. *Meditation* is not some Eastern religion blanking out your mind. Meditation is the Hebrew word that’s used in the Old Testament in different contexts to describe the cow that’s lowing, to describe the bird that’s cooing. It has to do with the muttering—it’s even translated that way in Isaiah—the idea of having that thing so in me, it’s just like I’m muttering the truth of God’s Word. I’m mulling it over. It’s not like a first grader trying to read a book moving his lips, you know, because he can’t read in his mind. That’s not the point. It’s that I’m so immersed in this text it’s like it’s coming out of my mouth—mulling it over—continually bathing my mind in that. We need more biblical encounters.

One text on this if we have time—real quick—Deuteronomy 11. I’m making a strategic sacrifice of time here. But Deuteronomy 11 would be an important text for us. And as you’re turning there, let me remind you of another one that we always think of—speaking of not standing, or walking rather, in the counsel of the wicked: how about Romans 12:2 that says, “Don’t be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” How often? How about the Hebrew idiom—day and night. All the time. Consistently having my mind renewed, and then I’m able to discern what the will of God is—what God wants—what is good, acceptable—*teleios*, remember that word?—perfect—just right.

All right, Deuteronomy 11—did I give you plenty of time to get there? Verse 16. I’ve got to give you some context here, because here the solution I’m providing is based on the same problem we’re dealing with in this text. Verse 16: “Take care lest your *lev*—your thinker—be deceived.” Let’s just start thinking wrong thoughts, the composite of truth and lies—“and you turn aside to serve other gods and worship them.” There’s the danger—and that’s what we’re talking about this morning—and Satan would love to get you to get there and to do that.

Then there’s a consequence, verse 17: “the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you. He’ll shut up the heavens, there’ll be no rain, the land will yield no fruit, you’ll perish quickly off the good land the Lord has given you.” And I understand the context—it’s national, it’s corporate, it’s the *palace*—the covenant that’s coming up in seven more chapters. I understand we’re dealing with something covenantal here as it relates to the people of Israel going into Canaan. But you can understand—and we can apply this certainly to our Christian lives—knowing it ain’t gonna go well with God and me if I am letting my mind get led astray and deceived, and I start turning away like 1 John 5:21 says, and I’m not guarding myself against idols. My mind is not receiving the truth. It’s getting all messed up in my head.



The answer—verse 18: “You shall therefore”—now, *therefore*—that’s the answer to what? The problem in verse 16 and the consequences in verse 17. What’s the answer? “Lay up these words of mine”—God says—“in your heart”—your *lev*, your thinker—“and your soul” (the entirety of who you are), “and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand.”

If you’ve ever been to Israel, or been to some Orthodox Jewish part of this country—if you even fly to Israel (we talk about our Israel trip coming up)—sometimes you’ll see the Orthodox Jews—they’ll put a box on the back of their hand and strap leather around—the *phylacteries*—and that little box has a little parchment that has parts of the Scripture on it. You think that’s what this passage means? Not to offend the Orthodox Jews—but no, that’s not what the passage means. Binding a little piece of the Scripture in a box on the back of my hand—that doesn’t get it. That’s not what we’re talking about. If I’ve laid the Bible—the words of God—in my mind and my soul, my hands are going to be governed by that. You think Eve, reaching out to grab that fruit, is going to have the word of God bound to her hands? If she knows—God was very clear about what she could eat and what she couldn’t. It was Satan who had come in to deceive her—to take the truth with a composite and give her a little bit of truth and a lot of lie—and to move her into a place where her hands weren’t bound by the words; the words weren’t bound to her hands. Not about phylacteries here—it’s about the Word of God being so meshed and put into your brain that it affects your actions.

Look at this: “They shall be frontlets between your eyes.” The *tefillin*—the Jewish people talk about that—another form of phylactery. It’s a box on their forehead. You get the real Orthodox Jews—you’ll see them strap that box of Scripture to the front of their head on certain days and festival days and Sabbath and all that. And you think, “What is that about? Is that really what God wants? His people to walk around with a box on their head?” That’s not the point. The Word of God is so laid up in my mind and in my soul that if you’re going to look at me and talk to me, guess what’s eventually going to come out? Guess what you’re going to see? Guess what we’re going to get back to? Something relating to the truth of God’s Word.

“You shall teach them to your children,” verse 19. “You shall talk of them when you’re sitting in your house, when you’re walking by the way, when you lie down, when you rise. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” This is not the *mezuzah*—if you know the Jewish word for it—those little boxes they put on the doorframes, and in it they scroll up, usually put a little part of Deuteronomy 6 in there. Is that what it’s about? Little decorative little boxes with Scripture in it as I walk through the doorway of my home? No—that’s not what it’s about. It’s not about decorative boxes that have a piece of Scripture in it that I can’t even see or read. This is about the Word of God being so involved in everything that we do. When we sit down, we’re talking about it; when we rise up, we’re talking about it; when we’re walking along the way, we’re talking. You cannot walk through one room



into the next without having some reminder of the truth of God's Word, because it's dominating the conversation in your home. Not about phylacteries, not about the mezuzahs, not about the tefillin—this is about the Scripture being so much a part of your life.

Why? Verse 21—the contrast of verse 17. Instead of the negative and getting God frustrated and angry, it's about “your days and the days of your children being multiplied in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth.” Man, it'll go good for you. That sounds a lot like Psalm 1—meditates on it day and night; everything he does prospers; like a tree planted by a stream, sending its roots down, bearing fruit, green leaves; whatever he does prospers. Biblical encounters.

Out of time—letter B. This text talks about the enemy. I don't want to make too much of this in the text, but if you look elsewhere, whenever we're dealing with the enemy and your encounter with the enemy—as Jude wrote regarding the false teachers, the arrogant, brash false teachers of the day—they were saying all kinds of blasphemous things and acting like they had authority they didn't. And he enlists the example of Michael the archangel—when he's arguing with Satan about the body of Moses, remember that passage?—and he doesn't rebuke him directly. He says, “The Lord rebuke you.” And what's the point there? The point is that Michael understands something that all of us need to understand: if the fight is bigger than us, we'd better be deferring to God. And even that phrase—it's a prayer. It's not, “The Lord rebuke you.” “Lord, rebuke him.” There's this idea of deference. Let's put it this way: we need more (letter B) **biblical prayers**.

When you share the gospel, if you don't bathe that encounter in prayer, then you're thinking somehow it's just about the way you deliver the word, and it's not about God getting involved in it. Every time I preach, every time I teach, I've got a series of prayer meetings I go through—several prayer meetings just on Sunday morning—three that I can think of where I pray with other people about the effectual communication of God's Word. “Well, either you've got it down by now or you don't, Mike. If you didn't study...” Well, it's not about studying. It's not about the presentation. It's about, when it's presented, the spiritual battle going on in this room. We want God to succeed, and the only way to do that is to enlist a series of biblical prayers.

And lastly—letter C—lightning fast, okay? Let's just put it down, and I'll try to prove this to you maybe briefly or another time—**biblical actions**. We need more biblical actions. Let me just prove it this way: you can expect the effectual, good impact of God's Word to have that difference in your life when the last time he presented to you something, you blew it off.



I'll illustrate it this way—Psalm 32. In Psalm 32, David has committed adultery with Bathsheba. He was under the conviction of God—he even confesses he was under the heavy conviction of God, like God's hand was heavy upon him. Now, here's a man after God's own heart—do you think they were making good progress in his spiritual growth at that point? The answer: no. Why? Because there was something in his life he had not confessed. There was something in his life he knew was biblically wrong, and he did it, and he wasn't facing it. See, if you're not responding to the word that you have, do you think you're going to have a good encounter with the word this week? Some of you—you're thinking of leaving the church because "it's not doing it for me anymore." Maybe the reason is not me, and maybe it isn't the church—maybe it is—but maybe it's not. Maybe it's because you've heard the word and your heart has shut down on that word, and you've said, "I'm not going to do that. All right, give me the next one."

It's like the little reminder on my laptop—I open up my laptop, it tells me what I've got to do because I put a prioritized list of to-dos. I've got it on there every week. And in that list I can look at the first thing on the list that I know—that's the most important. It's chronological. It's happening as soon as I've got to deal with it. If I see it, I go, "Oh, I don't want to do that. Let's go on down there... Oh, that one looks hard... I forget—here, I'll do number seven because that looks easier." If I play that with God and his Word coming to me and being presented to me—not going to work. God is not going to move on to letter C if we're not dealing with letter B. You understand what I'm saying? We have to be responsive to the Word of God.

Now again, I'm just focusing on that—on us, on the receiving end of the word—but it also can be applied if you flip that around in terms of how non-Christians moving toward that—under the conviction of God's Spirit—moving toward repentance and faith. They need to respond to the truth that they know.

My fun-loving, naive roommate from Indiana—with the police escort off the basketball courts at Cabrini-Green—learned that's probably not where you belong. So it may surprise you—such a dangerous place—for me to tell you that my then-girlfriend, now wife, used to walk into Cabrini-Green every week with her skirt and her, you know, nice clothes on. And she would walk down there into Cabrini-Green. You think, "Is she crazy?" No. She went there as a part of a ministry to help tutor and bring these kids up to speed in terms of their academic achievement, so that something good would happen, and to give them some Bible in the process. This was her ministry—to walk into Cabrini-Green. What is going on there? Why would you let that happen?

Well, because she went with a purpose. And she went—as always happens within a ministry we did in Humboldt Park or Cabrini-Green or anywhere else in the difficult and violent areas of Chicago—we



went there with a lot of training, we went there with a lot of provision, with a lot of planning, with a lot of awareness of our surroundings—always in a group, with the right protection. We went in there thoughtfully. But we didn't retreat.

Some of you haven't shared the gospel for a long time. And a lot of this message is about presenting the truth and other people responding to it. And you haven't, because you found out it's dangerous. Your reputation will suffer. You get your feelings hurt. All I've got to tell you is—God has told us and commissioned us to get into this world, this dark world, and shine the light—or be salt is another analogy. And Jesus said when the salt becomes tasteless, it's good for nothing. All I'm telling you is: this is not about retreat. It's about *invading* the hostile, violent spiritual territory with the truth of God's Word—whether it's in a teaching setting or an evangelistic setting.

God, we know—we talked a lot about responding to the word this morning, which never affects that relationship in terms of eternal security, my adoption as a child—but certainly the spiritual gains and losses are big. So make us responsive to your word. If there is an area of conviction, we want to respond to it. So, God, thanks so much for today. May the lingering and resonant work of your word being proclaimed this morning impact us every day this week in a good and positive way. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.