THE PROBLEM AND POWER OF PAIN
WEEK 1 • DAILY BRIEFING 3 • PLEASURE OR MISSION

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

Revelation 21:4

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

This week follows Sunday's sermon, "The Threat of Pain," from Jesus' parable of the soils in Luke 8. You can watch or listen to the sermon at 1mso.church or on the One Missoula app.

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help me enjoy the good things You have given me in Your world without being mastered by them. Help me put first what You say is most important rather than what my own desire for pleasure wants to put in first place. I ask You for this wisdom and discipline in Jesus' name, amen.

TODAY'S TEACHING

On Sunday we walked through Jesus' parable of the soils in Luke 8. Yesterday was the rocky ground, where faith withers under trial. Today is the third soil, where the seed lands among thorns, and the thorns grow up with it and choke it out. Jesus says the thorns are "the cares and riches and pleasures of life." Here is today's idea in one sentence: pleasures choke out the Word when they move into first place. Pain drives people away from God, but pleasure drags them away, and the second one is usually much harder to notice. Today we are looking at what crowds out the Word in your own life, and tomorrow we will look at the good soil and what it costs to bear fruit that reaches other people.

Nobody wakes up one morning and decides to trade Jesus for a ski pass. It happens slowly. Hunting season is here, ski season is right behind it, and kids' sports run all year. In Missoula, the next five months can fill up before anyone stops to ask what that calendar is doing to them or their family. One Sunday in the woods turns into most Sundays in the woods. A few months later, a person who used to be in the Word every morning has not opened his Bible since Labor Day.

That raises two questions. The first is why this is such a big deal. It might sound like a scheduling problem, but Jesus does not treat a fruitless life as a small thing. Using another farming picture, He said, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 7:19). The night before He was crucified, He talked with His closest followers about fruit again, and we will read what He told them below.

The second question is whether that makes God anti-pleasure. Some people hear a warning like this and conclude that the safest Christian life is the one with the least fun in it. Paul confronted that idea in a letter to Timothy, a younger leader he had trained, who was leading the church in Ephesus. We will read his answer below too.

Here is where this is going. The problem is not kids' sports, hunting, skiing, or fun. The problem is sequence. Jesus said the greatest commands are to love God with everything you have and to love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:30–31). That means worshiping God, making disciples, and seeking the Kingdom come first (Matthew 6:33). Then you work so you can feed, clothe, and shelter yourself and not be a burden to others (1 Thessalonians 4:11–12). Then you provide for your family if you have one (1 Timothy 5:8), and you disciple your kids if you've got them in your life (Ephesians 6:4). Hunting and ski season are awesome, but they come after all of that. Recreation is a REWARD for a job well done, and it RESTORES you for the job to come. When Jesus' disciples came back worn out from a preaching trip He had sent them on, He told them, "Come

away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while" (Mark 6:31). Rest after the work is Jesus' idea. Recreation in place of the work is the thorn choking out your fruitfulness.

READ & MEDITATE

Luke 8:14

And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.

John 15:5–6, 8

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. [6]If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. … [8]By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

1 Timothy 4:4–5

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, [5]for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

1 Timothy 6:17

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

Matthew 6:33

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

As you read, watch for what God warns against and what God gives freely.

REFLECT

Reminder: honest introspection and Scripture-informed self-assessment are far more beneficial than self-delusion and wishful thinking.

Jesus explains the thorny soil in one sentence, and the sentence ends with the result.

1. Fill in the blank from Luke 8:14: "and their fruit does not _____."*

Jesus says the choking happens "as they go on their way." What does that phrase tell you about the role of focus and intentionality in the process of faith getting choked out?

In John 15, Jesus is not talking to outsiders. He is talking to the men who had followed Him for about three years.

2. Fill in the blank from John 15:8: "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so _____ to be my disciples."*

According to verse 6, what happens to a branch that does not abide in Jesus?

That is why the choking thorns are not a small problem. A life where pleasure has choked out the Word does not produce fruit, and Jesus says fruit is what shows a person is genuinely His disciple.

Paul wrote this part of his letter to warn Timothy about teachers who were adding rules and restrictions that God never gave.

3. What does 1 Timothy 4:4 say about the things God created?

Now read 1 Timothy 6:17. What does it say about God?

Some Christians conclude that fun is suspicious and that the most spiritual life is the one with the least enjoyment in it. That idea is called “asceticism,” and Paul confronts it. The teachers he warned Timothy about would “forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods” (1 Timothy 4:3). For balance, later in the same letter, he points the rich away from trusting their money and toward the God who gives them good things to enjoy. God is not anti-fun or anti-pleasure. He is pro-mission at any cost, and His gifts belong in their proper place in a disciple’s priorities.

Jesus did not only tell His followers to seek the Kingdom. He told them to seek it first.

4. Think about your calendar, your bank statement, and what you daydream about most. What has first place in each of them?

Where has a good thing in your life moved ahead of God and the responsibilities He has given you?

Kids usually learn more from what you do than from what you say, and values are caught more than they are taught.

5. If your kids, or anyone else who watches your life, described what comes first for you based only on your calendar, what would they say?

There is no formula that guarantees how anyone turns out. A parent can do this well and still watch a child walk away, and every person answers to God for their own choices. Still, kids notice when parents say God comes first but treat Him like He can stay only where He fits around recreation, and they often follow what they saw rather than what they heard. You cannot control the outcome, but you can control the example you set, and that example is something you will give an account for to God.

What is one good thing that needs to move back into its proper place in your life this week?

Do some honest introspective self-assessment before moving on.

**These fill-in-the-blank questions use the ESV text. Your Bible may use different words for the same idea.*

PRAYER

Write your prayer or pray out loud.

MEMORY VERSE

Write or recite Revelation 21:4 from memory.