

OVERCOMING DISTRACTIONS

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Take a minute to pray for God to guide you as you study...

Right now, if you scroll your newsfeed on Facebook, if you look at the stories on Instagram, if you flip through the channels on TV, you're going to get overwhelmed with one thing: opinions. It seems as though *EVERYONE* has an opinion these days, and no one is afraid to share it! People want to talk about their opinion on the government and whether Republicans or Democrats are better. People want to share their opinion about race relations and police brutality. Even in the church, people freely share their opinion about women's ordination or which version of the Bible is the best. Everyone has an opinion, including YOU!

When it comes to evangelizing and sharing your love of Jesus with someone else, often times opinions get in the way. You might be out getting your mail when your neighbor sees you and strikes up a conversation about politics. It wouldn't take much for opinions to take over and you both to storm back into your houses, but you wouldn't do that, because you are living to help others know Jesus! And often times, when you're trying to share the most important message ever, the Devil will use opinions, questions or anything else to sidetrack you from sharing the message about Jesus. These distractions are intentional ways to avoid the beautiful saving message that everyone needs.

There's a familiar story in the Bible where Jesus is sharing a life-giving message to a woman. As Jesus is speaking to her heart, she tries to distract him. You can read the story for yourself in **John 4:1-15**. Read it now, and then we'll look at some specific verses where Jesus doesn't allow the distraction to steer him away from the beautiful message that she needs to hear.

Jesus has been talking about water, living water. They are at a well, so it is a natural topic. Jesus has helped her get past the Jew/Samaritan drama. If you don't know the history, Jews and Samaritans hated each other! They didn't associate with each other. They tried never to travel through any city or location where the other would be. But on this occasion, Jesus chooses to go through Samaria, and it's pretty obvious that his reason was to talk with this woman at the well. And as they are talking, Jesus invites her to drink some of this living water that gives life abundantly. As she asks for some of this water, Jesus cuts straight to the core of her struggles - her relationships with men.

Here's how Jesus asks her the tough question, and listen to her reply. See how she tries to side-step the truth with her response.

John 4:16-17: "He told her, 'Go, call your husband and come back.' 'I have no husband,' she replied."

She avoids the truth and the core need she has as she tries to find a loop-hole in Jesus' question. It's her distraction. It's her way of denying what is really going on in her life. She doesn't want to admit it.

Here's the deal: you **WILL** face distractions when you are trying to share Jesus with others. It's part of the job. People are hesitant to open themselves up and let God change them. And while it is NOT your job to convict someone else's heart, it IS your job to remove distractions so that they can hear God speaking to them.

As the woman at the well does a marvelous job of trying to change the subject to something that is more comfortable to her, Jesus brings it right back to the point.

John 4:17: "Jesus said to her, 'You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.'"

That may seem pretty pointed, right? Jesus goes right to the core of the issue which is her struggle with her identity as a child of God. She continually had been married, divorced, remarried, divorced, and now she was trying to fulfill her desire of relationship by living with some other man that wasn't her husband!

Jesus cuts right to the core to help her see her need of a relationship with God. And as you deal with people that you are actively trying to disciple, you may find that you need to be blunt or even pointed in order for them to see their need for Jesus. The reality is that at the point where this kind of distraction comes up with someone, you've probably already built a relationship with them where they trust you and it's ok to be a little pointed.

I know that it may seem difficult to be so direct when you're talking with someone, but because you are on a mission of making disciples, this is where you must be bold. In fact, Timothy writes about the boldness that is required for those that are disciples making other disciples.

2 Timothy 1:7: "For God has not given us a spirit of _____, but of power and love and discipline."

This is central to being a disciple-maker! Timid people won't quit when it gets difficult. Timid people run from difficult conversations. Timid people ask the hard questions, won't be pointed when they need to be, and won't be bold when it is needed. And God hasn't given disciple-makers timid spirits, but instead, He's given you a spirit of power to share His love with everyone! That's why we are here, and with that purpose in mind, the fear of being bold shouldn't be something that holds you back from helping someone else know Jesus.

BASIC POINT

You **WILL** face distractions when discipling others, but God has given you boldness to share Jesus with them.

WHAT DO I DO WHEN DISTRACTIONS COME?

Pause: When someone tries to ignore the point and purpose of what we are talking about, I like to just pause for a moment. It gives me time to think about what they are actually saying. It allows me to ask the question, "Why are they trying to distract us?" Pausing allows me the opportunity to think about what is making this uncomfortable for them, and if I feel like it's because the Holy Spirit is speaking to their heart, I usually press a little harder. Sometimes it takes a human to crack the door of the human heart for the Holy Spirit to do His work.

Pray: After pausing for a moment to understand the situation, I pray. No, it's not a long, drawn-out, kneel-down kind of prayer. It may just be an eye-open, quick, one-word prayer, but it's a prayer for the Holy Spirit to guide my words as we move forward. I don't want to hurt someone, and it may take the Holy Spirit softening my words, or the opposite, making my words a little more pointed, to make this conversation powerful. Prayer is an invitation for God to use the words to His benefit and how He sees fit.

Purpose: After pausing and praying, I try and return our conversation to the purpose, which is for Jesus to become a permanent fixture in their hearts! With that purpose in mind, they know that I am only seeking good for them. And, because they know that I'm seeking good for them, they realize that my boldness is only because I believe that I have something that is invaluable to them. It actually puts more weight behind what I'm saying.

Here's the reality, when the distractions come (side-stepping, asking distracting questions, changing the subject, ignoring what you're asking, etc.) you really have an opportunity. This behavior means that they are at a place where they are ready for the Holy Spirit to speak to them. It should be a trigger for you to press a little harder.

BUT WHAT IF THEY CRY?

In my years of pastoral ministry, I have seen many people cry. Sometimes it's over struggles in their life. Sometimes it is because of joy that they are experiencing. But almost always, tears are a sign of a tender part of their life. If you see emotions through someone's tears, you don't need to back away. Instead, it's an opportunity to comfort and gently point them to Jesus as the Ultimate Comforter!

While talking with someone that is obviously at a tender point in their life might be a little scary, there are a million promises where Jesus encourages us with His presence as we go on His mission. One of those promises is found in Matthew 10.

Matthew 10:20: "For it is not you who speak, but it is the _____ of your Father who speaks in you."

Being on God's mission is an incredible, special Human-God connection where He uses your words to speak to the heart of someone else. It's His mission, and He'll use you in the process. What an honor and privilege it is to be used by Him to help someone grow to know Him better!

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

1. What are some common distractions that you can see happening as you disciple someone else?
2. Why is it so scary to be bold and "pointed" with someone else? How can you overcome that fear?

LESSON 8: OVERCOMING DISTRACTIONS

