

The Distractions of Life

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Speaker: **James Bronner**

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James Bronner: You never know what others are going through, that's why you have to be sensitive to God's Spirit and His voice.

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(Music Playing 00:00:22 - 00:00:50)

And now for 8242, The Distractions of Life.

James Bronner: Welcome to brothers of the word, because brother, you need the word.

There was a businessman, the story of him that he had this big deal that was pending and he was almost to the end of this deal and he needed a few million dollars that didn't come through to really close this deal at the end of it. All of the contracts were ready sign, and it was going to really change his life forever and just really set him straight. He got to the end and he was short about \$2 million to really close it. He went through all of his business training and everything from school and experience that he knew, he just couldn't come up and it was a few days away from closing the deal that would set him straight forever. So, he really got to the end of desperation and said, "I need divine intervention in this, I can't do it in the natural." So, he went to the Church and it was in a regular church day.

He was just going to go in and pray it all to God by himself. He got to the Church and got up to the altar and there was another guy already praying at the altar and he was just fervently crying out and saying, "Lord I need a hundred dollars to really keep us from getting put out and keeping the lights on to really support our family, Lord. I don't know what to do. The bill collector is coming. I need this \$100 to keep from getting put out." The businessman, he took out his wallet, before he got on to pray, he pulled out a \$100 bill and put it in the other praying man's hand. The guy got up and said, "Sir, you just don't know, this is the answer to our prayer. You're really helping our family out, you're just such a great and compassionate guy." That guy left and he had the answer to his prayer. Then the businessman, he took the altar by himself and he said, "Lord, now that I have your undivided attention, I need \$2 million quick."

That businessman, he wanted God's undivided attention, but I'm here today to tell you that the problem is not on God's end getting his undivided attention. The problem is, he can't get our attention. He promised He would listen in His Word and Jesus even promised, "Ask and it shall be given. You seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall be opened," and we don't have to work at getting His attention, He has to work at getting ours. From this parable, I speak today from the subject of The Distractions of Life. The Distractions of Life, and this is really a follow-up message to pastor Nathaniel's message from last Sunday on prayer because what I find is the number one reason Christians aren't praying like they should is because of distractions that they're using that time in drawing in their attention so, I was going to preach on something else but God stirred me on this direction and He wanted me to stand the same thing that pastor began on last week.

In the book of Ezekiel, God complained that these people have ears to hear but they never hear. They have eyes to see but never see. Why don't they hear and see? Because they're not paying attention. They have ears to hear but they're not listening to the things that they need to listen to. They have eyes to see but they're not seeing the things and paying attention to those things that they need to be watching.

The number one cause of accidents among young adults is no longer DUI as it was in our day, but it is now DWD which is distracted while driving. Distracted driving contributes to 58% of automobile crashes among teen drivers today. Texting while driving is six times more likely to cause an accident over being drunk. Just like driving while distracted is causing more accidents than anything else. Living while distracting is causing more accidents in our lives that could be avoided on our path.

A teen driver with only one additional passenger doubles the risk of getting into a fatal car accident with two or more passengers, they are five times as likely to get into an accident. So, hearing those stats that just one person makes it many more times to get into an accident and more than one makes it five times as likely.

Imagine in the real world, if you had three friends that were around you most of the day, and one friend was on this side pulling out his wallet with pictures all day long saying, “Hey man, look at this vacation we went on. Look at my kids what they’re doing now. Hey, look at where we ate at last, don’t this food look good?” You have another friend behind you all day long telling you about the latest news on the Internet. “This is what I read yesterday. This was going on with this,” and you had a third friend that was giving you all of the latest gossip half of the day in your ear. The friend was saying, “Hey man, did you hear about Kim and Kanye, I heard they’re splitting up and you know about Trump? What’s going on?”

If you saw a person walking around with three friends giving them all of this chatter all day long, you would look at it and say, “That seems mighty distracting. I don't know how you could get anything done.” Well I’m here to tell you that you would say that looking at it in real life but because it’s hidden in a device with social media doing that all day long, it’s disguised and it looks normal and it’s what we are used to and is no longer alarming. Taking our attention and distracting us from those things that we should be focusing on.

There’s another parable of a guy that was on his way to a meeting and he was walking down the street and some of you have heard me tell this before and he was on his way to this meeting and he got distracted. He was walking about this fence and he looked at the sign and it said that the Johnson Home for Mental Rehabilitation, and he was walking and he saw a hole in the fence and he heard behind the fence all of these people just chanting, 13, 13, 13. He kept walking and this fence was down the long sidewalk on the way to his meeting and he just kept hearing this chanting, 13, 13, 13. As he was going to the meeting, he kept wondering, he just got distracted about it going to the meeting. He said, “I wonder what in the world are these crazy people over there just chanting 13. No wonder they’re in this place,” and he saw this little hole in the fence.

He said, “I know I got to get to this meeting but I’ve got to see what’s going on over here. I got to see why they’re in there.” He bent down to put his eye to listen and see what it is they’re chanting 13, 13, he put his eye to the hole and (00:07:39) and he heard, 14, 14, 14. He got distracted, took his eye off of what he

was supposed to be watching. Some of you that didn't get that, you think about it in the car, you'll get that later, all right?

Reality TV is one of the biggest genres of this age in media and we'd rather be watching what's going on in somebody else's life than paying attention and being diligent with our own lives. Before, reality TV, when we were growing up, that version was soap operas and my wife was telling me yesterday. She said, "You didn't know it but when we first got married," she said, "I used to watch a lot of soap operas," and I said "What stopped it?" She said, "You didn't even really get on me." She said, "You came home from work one day and you came in and I was watching soap operas." She said, "You just asked the question, have you been watching these soap operas all day?" She said, "Yup." And she said, "I thought about it later on," and that wasn't a good answer, it didn't sound right to me and she said, "I made a decision to stop watching those soap operas just by you asking that question. You didn't even have to get on me. That's the older version of a reality TV.

Life pulls us in one direction after another and even we strive to do Bible class at home with our kids once or twice a week but you know we get off of that a lot of times and it's not that we don't understand the importance of it. It's not that we don't feel the presence of God in the midst of it. It's not even at the children complaining about being in it.

When you boil it down to the truth is, we get distracted. It's the same reason when you really tell the truth about the matter. So, this message even for me today and even for my wife today, I'm not preaching at you, I'm preaching with you today and to myself today. This is something that I believe we all struggle with from time to time. They call today's world a connected world, but I ask the question, "What are we really connected to?" We're more connected to the world through the worldwide web otherwise known as the Internet but there's a reason that they call it a web. We are less connected to our creator and less connected to our families but more connected to this web.

00:10:00

I'm a technology person myself and it's what I went to college for and it's what I work in and I stay up on all of the latest tech. But even as a techie, as a minister and a counselor, when we

talk with people and really look at the problems that they're going through, I realize even as a minister, that technology hasn't made people any happier in their lives. They still have the same core problem areas than they did before technology existed in today's form. A good example of this is if you look at teenagers who are more connected on devices and the Internet than any other age group that today versus 30 years ago, the rate of teenage depression has actually doubled. So that tells us about the core really essential areas of life and how technology has still not made people happier.

Teenagers today are doubled the depression rate from they were 30 years ago. So, realizing that distractions are the biggest replacements for the time they were supposed to be spending with God or spending improving ourselves, how do we combat these distractions? I found that the management of time is very similar to the management of money. Both of them have to be managed carefully. The most successful strategy in managing money is saving and prioritizing it on the front end of the top and sending it up automatically. Most people will do it through either 401(k) that come off their check before they get their money, or they will have a direct deposit that'll put 5% or 10% on the savings account and this way, they can go about the week and the month and whatever they spend, they've got this money saved for emergencies and for retirement and it's what experts have found works best.

I found that the time with God works the same way best of automating and in prioritizing it to do it first. The best time to spending prayer and reading the Bible is in the morning before the distractions start sucking you in because the minute you start checking your email or doing other things, you get in this rabbit hole that just leads you down. You get on social media to see what's going on right quick and before you know it, 20 minutes is gone by. It just really grabs a hold of your time so the best time I found is before you get involved with any of that and that would normally require, if you wanted to spend 15 or 20 minutes with God in prayer and reading his Word, then you'd have to get up that amount of time earlier before you would start your normal required morning routine.

I did some research to see what folks did upon waking up and here's what I found. That 80% of smartphone users check their phone as the first thing they do when they wake up. 80% of

smartphone users, their first action upon waking up is checking their smart phone. The top three things that the research said that they do when they get on those phones are text, emails, and social media. And then, it went on to news and other things after that. But those are top three and that's 80%. So realizing that one of the major problems is that 80% of people are getting on the phones and there's so many distractions in this one device.

I began to think about ways of really combating it to give you something practical to really combat this problem and I know so many people deal with it of all ages. I thought about it, I said, "They're in the habit of turning their phone on and you can see all of these alerts and sometimes you really don't mean to be on it that long but you turn it on and see these things to deal with or things that grab your attention so I say maybe an app that can be when it'll detect your first time turning the phone on that day. It'll pop-up a screen and remind you of the important things that you really ought to be doing.

I searched the App Store and I couldn't find one. So, I knew I was doing this message today and we actually have an App on the App Store that really helps pastor and I and some of our family to really track the essential good habits that we ought to be doing on a day-to-day basis and I couldn't find it. So, I contacted my developers and this week, they will be adding that feature to our app. The app is available free of charge and it's on Android and iOS. It's called iVictory habit tracker and the feature we're adding into it is that it'll detect the first time of the day that you cut your phone off, and it will place a screen there and it'll have a custom question that you will put in that'll show every morning.

So, the question that I will use on mine is, "Are you going to put God first in your life today through prayer and Bible reading?" You'll be able to put your question in there and you would have to dismiss the screen, either hit yes or no because so many times what happens with Christians, we'll say in Church, "I want to put God first." Raise your hand if you want to put God first in your life and that's almost every hand in here, but I'm going to ask you to raise it if you're doing that right now.

But what I'm showing you, everybody wants to put him first, but so many distractions of life keep us from doing so. So, the idea was to pop up this screen and to make you not just convicted in Church but every morning make a conscious decision, "Will I put Him first in my life today?" So, before you go on to social media or email or text, you'll have to look yourself in the face and ask yourself this question every single day, "Will I put him first in my life?" So, the update will push out this week and you can go ahead and grab the app and get it on your phone but it's iVictory Habit Tracker absolutely free of charge. The six top excuses that Christians use for not praying and reading their Bible even though 90% plus know that they should. Number one, they say, "I'm too busy." Number two, they say, "I don't know how to pray or don't understand the Bible." Number three, they say, "I'm too tired in the morning and at night or I just don't feel like it." Number four they say, "It's too boring." Number five they say, "I'm not worthy or God is not interested in my small stuff." Number six they say, "The belief in it won't change anything anyway." They have that belief that it won't change anything.

Those are the top six excuses that Christians use and you may have made some of these excuses in your own mind. Being people's number one excuse for spending time or not spending time with God is, "I'm too busy." Let me give you some statistics that I found that relates. Social media users spend an average of one hour and 42 minutes a day on social media in this country one hour and 42 minutes is the average what people who are on social media spend their day. Americans watch almost three hours of TV a day when you average it out throughout the week and people can now get the distractions whenever and wherever they are with on-demand media on your devices and on your TV. You don't have to wait on your favorite show to come on. You can just go to on demand and watch it now.

The average American adult cell phone owners check their cell phone 150 different times throughout the day on average. Some of you may have checked it a few times since you've been in Church. Many people even report experiencing what's called phantom vibrations or sounds, meaning that they think they feel or hear a notification when one didn't actually occur and it's a growing psychological phenomenon even when your phone isn't distracting you. You're so used to the distractions you think it's still there.

Let me just see by a show of hands I f you've had this experience in the last month where you thought you felt your phone vibrate or alerting when you looked at it and it wasn't actually alerting. Look around, now this is just in the last month, and this is how the distractions have gotten us programmed. You can put your hands down.

It shows you the phenomena that your brain is actually getting used to being distracted. An average Christina on the other hand of these stats praise three to seven minutes a day and that includes the meal time prayer. Life way research surveyed more than 2900 Protestant Church goers and found that while 90% desire to please and honor Jesus in all they do, only 19% personally read the Bible every day. 90% said that they want to please Him and put Him first but only 19% actually do. I don't have time to really go through and bust each one of the other five excuses that Christians use because of time, but I'll just tell you that what I found in life, is that with people, no matter how busy or tired that they are, those things that they really want to do, they find that both the time and the energy to do those things.

If you ask the average husband, the wife ask him, "Baby you want to go shopping with me today even if it's a Saturday, not a work day." They all find a thousand excuses to give you. I'm guilty of it myself. They say, "Well, you know I got to do this and this," and that is going on and it'll be one excuse after another. But if you would ask that same man and he got the same schedule, same level of tiredness, if a buddy of his come along and say, "You know, I have this ticket purchased for somebody and they dropped out and this thing is for game five of the NBA finals, man. Do you have time and energy to go?" Every one of those man that made excuses on their cell phone will find the time and the energy and so it is with God.

It's not really a matter of time. It's not really a matter of energy but it is a priority and of making the decision of putting Him first. We also have many easy to read and understand Bible versions today, so it makes it so easy to understand even what the Bible is saying and talking to God. It seems hard at first but it's similar talking to strangers.

It's not easy talking to strangers, but it's easy talking to friends that you're familiar with, but if you go through the discipline and make the decision to talk to God every day, He will become your friend and you will develop a relationship and it'll be the same way, it'll be easy to talk with Him once He has become that friend to you.

Let me just quickly go through the five top benefits of prayer. Number one is, the primary way we get closer to God our creator and you have to have time together to build and maintain any a relationship. Number two, it helps combat against stress and study after study has shown that prayer and meditation reduces stress and blood pressure. Prayer helps us maintain our peace throughout the day from getting angry less and how many of you got co-workers or bosses and you need to have a reduction of stress in your life just from that alone? Number three, prayers help us to combat sin. A strong prayer-life will often help your conscious to stay strong and you'll get convicted easier and ask for forgiveness in the presence of God.

The Bible says in second Samuel starting at Verse 11, dealing with the story of David and Bathsheba, it says, "In the spring at the times when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the Kingsman and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabah. But David remained in Jerusalem. One evening, David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said she is Bathsheba, the daughter of Ilium and the wife of Uriah, the Hittite. Then David sent messengers to her to get her. She came to him and he slept with her." Bishop Dale made this statement, "Whenever you avoid the the battle you were born for, you will face a battle you are not equipped for."

David at the time, as the king, he was supposed to go with his soldiers into battle as the king and as the leader but he stayed behind in a life of confidence around in leisure that day and looked out over his balcony and saw this woman named Bathsheba. Even her very name began with bath, B-A-T-H, and he saw her in the bath and became tempted and ended up taking another man's wife and killing that me. So, it just shows you the danger of not paying attention to what you are supposed to be doing.

Number four benefit of prayer. It helps us get guidance for our lives. No man truly knows the future. God is the only one who knows your future and He looks at our lives from a different perspective of not just the right now but our future and we tend to just look at the right now and what's most convenient for the moment.

Most of my top business decisions that I've ever made have been out of my time of personal prayer. Even this past week, I woke up one morning and was praying and I told my wife, I said, "God impressed upon my heart this morning to deal with the situation at work that has been going on for a long time, months," so when I got into work and when I sat down with the person that I needed to handle this. Even before I could tell them what God had impressed upon my spirit, they began to tell me of two reports related to this issue that I was about to tell them about. I said, "I know exactly what I'm supposed to do to handle it," and I was able to give them direction. All out of prayer.

Number five benefit is it allows us to pray for others and intercede on their behalf. How many times have you thought about somebody and before you know it in the next day or two you got a call or you ran into them in the store. I have a friend that he lost his job from a long time, good job. When I heard about it, it was at the exact time he had been in my spirit for me to call and pray for him. You never know what others are going through, that's why you have to be sensitive to God's Spirit and his voice.

So, it allows others to be blessed and as I close, even as I was praying early this morning, I first of all repented to God myself of times when I got too busy and really didn't put him first in the morning. Second, I asked God, I said, "Lord, what is your heart that you really want me to tell the people about this message on distractions? I've got a lot of stuff written but give me Lord this day what you would want me to say from your heart." Within seconds, this is what was impressed upon my spirit. That was this morning.

He showed me an example of me sitting at our own dinner table and even with my own kids, God as the Heavenly Father sits in the position of me in my own home and I saw my own kids, those that I have helped raise from birth and those that I had paid for

the clothing and the shoes and their schooling and taken to practices and help with the homework and been at their programs and love all of their lives.

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Those that were dear to my heart, my own flesh and blood children and then that dinner that had been prepared from them with a labor of love. Once that plate is prepared, they're given the plate and instead of coming in and sit down at the table with me as their father that was waiting upon their presence, they took it and went to their rooms and got on their devices, distracted. That's a real example that we can relate to as parents.

The second thing I saw from the Heart of God this morning was sitting at a restaurant, out on a date with the person that I love and going to a fancy restaurant, ordered a fancy meal and invested in this meal and really wanted to sit with them and spend time. As the meal came, we were about to have a romantic dinner and all during the meal, that person was texting and on social media and I was sitting disconnected from her. That was the Heart of God that He showed me of how He feels when we are distracted as His children and He wants us to sit with him as He said in His Word.

He's running all of the universe but He makes time for us, but we put these little distractions that can do nothing for you. If you really had a need in your life, most of those people on social media wouldn't be there, but the only one who can heal your body, who can really get you out of a jam, we get distracted from Him.

So, even the parents, you can relate to how your children are when you're talking with them. It's real to you. He made it real to me. Even my own children, I have to force them to sit at the dinner table. They would literally take that plate, even as good children as they are, we have to force them to come and sit with us and that's how God feels. Even at the beginning of our date, I had to ask my wife, "This is our special time. We won't have any phones in. I have to text members even, I'm on a date with my wife. I don't talk on the phone and text when I'm out with my wife," but that is the way that God feels about us being distracted and missing time with Him.

A recent survey found that only 40% of families eat together at the dinner table at least three times a week and that doesn't even include the number that are at the table on their devices. That's just a number that sit down together. Only 40%, and on the second example, go to any restaurant, no matter how fine it is, look around at the couples and the family sitting there. Count the percentage that's on devices, distracted from family time.

People, let's change this and start treating God like we want to be treated by our own children, by our own loved ones. I thank you today for tuning in to brothers of the word because brother, you need the Word.

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