

the dirt! You can spend your whole life trying to prove to yourself that's not true. You can work and work or play and play or do whatever you want to try to find meaning in your life, but without God, we're just dirt, and we are reminded of that often. We like to blame God for our problems, but often the real problem is that we have let troubles and worries and wealth push God's Word out of our lives.

But that's not the life God wants for you! If you've been feeling like dirt lately, if you've been struggling to find the meaning of your life, then let God remind you what it is. He has called you heavenward in Christ Jesus. You see, God is good at making wonderful things out of dirt. That's what God did in the Garden of Eden. He took dirt in his hands and formed it into the first human being—Adam. He breathed in him the breath of life and made him his special possession. That's exactly what God's done with you. God is the one who made you. You're not a mistake! You were formed by the hand of God, and you were saved by the blood of Jesus who died for you.

So Jesus concludes, "*The one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.*" When a farmer puts seeds into the dirt in his fields, something wonderful happens. That dirt produces corn and beans and cucumbers and watermelons. When God puts the seed of his Word into the dirt of our hearts, beautiful things happen. He gives us the confidence and hope that there's a place waiting for us in heaven when we die. And he gives us the courage to live our lives for him. To love as he has loved. To serve as we have been served. Until we reach our goal.

So keep your eyes focused on the goal. Jesus is what gives your life purpose right here on earth. It's easy to feel useless. To compare ourselves to others and come up short. You know someone famous who's my same age? LeBron James. He's 29 too, like me. He's been to ten NBA All-Star games and is worth \$270 million. Man, what have I been doing with my life? But I've got a different goal. It's not to be the best basketball player. It's not to make it to the World Cup. It's not to start your own company. It's not to have four kids and a nice house and a swimming pool. Those would be nice things. But God has bigger plans for you. You're headed to heaven!

And if that's your goal, then here's how you can set your life and your family toward that goal. Hear and take to heart God's word. Often! Your faith in Jesus is a living thing. It's always either growing or dying. Just think of the grass around here. We had the wettest June on record, and the grass was as green as can be. So how's your grass looking right now? It's getting dry and brown. Because it needs water all the time. Just like your faith in Jesus. Today you're growing. This last week at soccer camp, those kids were growing as they heard about Jesus every day. So what about tomorrow? What about next week? Next month? Next year? "*I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus!*"

Matthew 13:1-9,18-23
Rev. Nathan Nass

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That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ²Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹He who has ears, let him hear." ¹⁸"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. ²²The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. ²³But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

Toward the Goal

One of my favorite soccer memories comes from the summer of 2007. I was studying Spanish in Chile, and one night there was a huge soccer match between Chile and Mexico. I watched the game downtown with hundreds of fans on a huge outdoor screen. The game went into overtime, and when it was over, the people were overjoyed, because the final score was 0-0. I think that's one of the reasons why soccer hasn't been quite so popular in the U.S. Can you imagine a football game ending 0-0? But soccer does have one thing going for it. The fact that goals are so infrequent makes them that much more special. All eyes are focused on just one thing. There're no field goals, no 3-point line, no ground-rule doubles. Everyone's eyes are focused on the goal.

And that's exactly how God wants you to live your life. Now it's true that the Bible doesn't say anything about soccer. But it does talk about goals. God sets a goal for us that's more important than kicking a ball into a net. Our theme verse for our soccer camp this week was, "*I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*" Just like a soccer player has one thing on his mind—score a goal!—God has one goal on his mind when he thinks of us—heaven. That's why he sent Jesus to

save us. Your life has a purpose. It has direction. It has a goal. God says to you today, “Press on toward the goal of heaven!”

To help us do that, Jesus tells us a story. A farmer went out to plant. He didn’t have a big tractor. He had a bag of seed, and he spread it as evenly as he could with his hand. But he couldn’t do it perfectly. Some seed fell on the hard path, and birds quickly ate it up. Some fell on rocky soil. As soon as the sun came up, the little plants burned out because they didn’t have any roots. Some seed fell among the thistles, and they choked it out. But some seed fell in good soil and produced a big crop. Just like the farmer wanted. Because a farmer doesn’t just plant seeds for fun. He has a mission. He wants plants that produce fruit until it’s time to harvest them. That’s his goal!

This is a pretty easy story to see what Jesus was talking about. The farmer is God, and his seed is God’s Word—the Bible. And God is always trying to spread his Word around. But God doesn’t just spread his Word around for fun. Just like the farmer, he’s got a very particular purpose. God wants his Word to take root in our hearts, so that we grow and grow and produce lots of good fruits for him. Fruit like all the volunteers who gave a week of their time at our soccer camp. Fruit like the kids at our camp reciting the Bible verses they’ve learned. God’s goal for every single person is that they have a fruitful life now on earth until he harvests them home to heaven.

There’re a lot of parents here today. When you think of your kids—whether they’re six months or sixty years old—I know you want what’s best for them. In fact, you’d probably even say that you want better for them than for yourself. So when you feel that love and that desire for what’s best for your kids well up inside you, remember that God calls himself our Father. He feels the same way about you. He wants what is absolutely best for you. And he knows that the best thing for you is to know Jesus as your Savior and live with him in heaven. That’s God’s goal for you.

But there are a lot of people who don’t reach that goal. There are a lot of dangers that are trying to keep you and your family out of heaven. Jesus says: “*When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.*” How often do we hear the Bible and think, “That’s not meant for me”? How often do we keep ourselves and our families from hearing God’s Word altogether? There’s no worse position anyone could be in! What would you call a soccer player who never plays soccer? Not a soccer player! What would you call a Christian who never hears about Jesus? Not a Christian! The fact that you are here in God’s house encourages me that that’s not the case with you.

But there are more dangers that get between us and our goal. Jesus continues: “*The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.*” There are people who when they hear about Jesus for the first time—or when they get back into church for the first time in a while—they are excited for

Jesus! They are so happy to be back in church, “*but since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.*” Faith in Jesus is not the same as excitement or happiness. Those emotions go away. Faith is having roots. It’s deep trust in God’s love for us.

You need roots. You need Jesus as your rock, because the devil is going to throw everything he can at you. Troubles and persecutions will come. And Jesus compares the troubles of our lives with the sun. Think of what the sun does to a plant. If the plant is well-watered, when the sun shines, the plant grows. If the plant isn’t watered, when the sun shines, the plant dies. The same troubles in life can cause two different people to have very different reactions. If you are rooted in Jesus, the troubles in life will teach you to trust in Jesus even more completely. But if you aren’t hearing God’s Word, the same troubles will sap your strength until you feel like nothing.

I bet you know what that feels like. But even if you haven’t seen yourself in those first two seeds, Jesus’ next words will hit home: “*The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.*” It is easy to be a distracted Christian! The “worries of life.” What have you worried about just in this worship service? Work tomorrow? Vacation next week? Bills due? Car trouble? Training camp? Cancer? Worries are thorns, aren’t they? They are always around us, and even when we’re sitting in church, they choke out God’s Word so we don’t listen.

And then there’s the “deceitfulness of wealth.” That is a good word—the *deceitfulness* of wealth. Wealth will not give you what it promises. It’s a deception. Money will not make you happy. So why do we live like it will? I met a man from Mexico last week who’s visiting relatives here in town. I asked him if he likes the United States. He said, “No! Everyone is too busy. Everyone is focused on making money. There’s no time for family. No time for God. Life here is too busy!” Is he right? You can’t do everything. Every single day you have to make choices. Those choices reflect your priorities in life. What are your priorities? Are they focused on your goal of heaven?

Every distraction is a thorn that threaten our faith in Jesus. They won’t kill our faith right away, but little by little our eyes drift away from our goal of heaven. I’ve never tried this—and I’m not suggesting it either!—but I’ve heard that if you put a frog in a pot of water at room temperature and turn on the burner, it will eventually boil to death. Even though that frog can jump right out of the pot anytime he wants to, as the water heats up slowly, he doesn’t even notice. Until it’s too late. As we get caught up further in all our little goals in life, we often don’t see how we’re getting further and further away from God. It’s too late. We don’t even notice it. Faith is gone.

And do you know what we are without God in our lives? Dirt. That sounds harsh, but who are we in the story? God is the farmer. The seed is the Word. What’s left? We’re