

Thorns: What Entangles You?

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[0:00] Please turn with me to Hebrews 4. If someone had been watching you in the last week, would they have seen behavior that's reflective of a child of God?

One who's been made new by the powerful, transforming work of Christ! Applied to us by the Holy Spirit. Would they have seen what Paul calls a new creation?

That's what God makes us to be when He saves us. New creatures. Did anybody see that in your life? 2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old is gone. The new has come. And most of you in this adult Sunday school class profess to be new creatures in Christ, to have faith in Christ. The question is, does your behavior demonstrate that reality?

Ephesians 1 and verse 4 says, For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world, to be holy and blameless in His sight. You believe that you're one of God's chosen ones.

[1:04] That's good. Are you holy and blameless? Because that's what He chose you for. So, what would people have seen in the last week? Would they have seen newness? Would they have seen holiness?

Would they have seen blamelessness in your life? Or would they have seen the same old behavior? Same old stuff that you did before coming to Christ?

You say, well, it depends on when they saw me. Okay? What would they have seen when you smashed your thumb with a hammer? When all the kids were crying at the same time? When you got cut off in traffic by the crazy driver?

What would they have seen? When your child came home with a bad report from school? When your husband was late for work and missed the dinner that you had worked so hard to prepare? When you got home from work and the dinner you were so looking forward to wasn't ready? What would they have seen? What did they see in me when I had been preparing this very lesson about thorns that crop up in the heat of life and I had gone well out of my way to find a particular store, to find a particular item and get there?

[2:09] and it was out of stock. What would they see in me? Did they see the new man or new woman in those situations of heat in your life? Or did they see the old man creeping in again?

If you're a new creature in Christ, where is your behavior lagging behind the reality? The reality is that you're a new creation. But is your life keeping up with that reality?

Is it reflective of that truth? Where in your life are you still producing prickly thorns where there should be good fruit? We want to talk today about the thorny behavior that still entangles us.

And then next week, look at the underlying heart problems that are behind that behavior. Why we do those wicked things still. Have those sinful responses.

So today, the behavior. Next week, the heart behind the behavior. And we'll look at that continuing to use Tim Lane and Paul Tripp's book, How People Change.

[3:11] Some of us, though we profess faith in Christ, can be stuck in the past. And there's a quote there on your handout. It is easy to forget the wonderful things that are ours as children of God.

It is easy to give way to thoughts, emotions, and desires that should no longer rule us. And easy to be more defined by our problems than by the grace of Christ.

That is why it is so important to remember the new character qualities and behavior patterns that are in your life because of Jesus. Humbly ask, God, where are you calling me to further change?

What qualities that you promised to your children are still not active in my heart? So you look at your life. You don't need somebody else to look at it and tell you about it.

You know there's still thorns cropping up there. Do you still twist the truth to avoid further trouble?

Do you blame other people? Do you manipulate others? Do you harbor anger and bitterness when

someone sins against you?

[4:07] That's that thorny behavior still there. Do you use harsh words? Do you slander other people? Even as our memory verse this morning says, do not slander one another, brothers.

Do you still find yourself doing that when you gossip and say things that you shouldn't? Do you still avoid the reality of your problems and bury yourself in a busy schedule or food or drugs or something else to make you not think about the trouble in your life?

That's a sinful response. Do you still give in to lust? Do you still take revenge? Do you still always think of self first and others second?

Do you envy? Those are thorns cropping up in your life. I trust as a Christian, a new creature in Christ, you are seeing growth. There's growth in grace. And when you see the thorns, I hope that you see them and that you're convicted by it and that you repent and that you take them back to the cross and say, God, forgive me.

I see this. And you never would have done that before. You wouldn't have cared about the thorny behavior in the past. And so there is growth in some areas. You don't like the thorns. You repent. And you're making progress.

[5:15] You're uprooting some thorns and there's better fruit. But still, you'd like to be free of the thorns altogether, wouldn't you? At least I hope you would. But some people are content with their present level of holiness.

Are you content? Some people become complacent with how far they've progressed in sanctification, with their growth in grace, with the change that God has called them to.

They're Christians. They go to church. They read their Bible. They give generously. They're a lot better than a lot of other people, even other professing Christians. But many are sinfully content with where they are.

And so the sin that remains in them, they say, well, I've come so far. What's left is no big deal. I haven't mastered my lust. I still really never got a grip on my temper. And this man has really not mastered the fine art of living with his wife in an understanding way.

But he's okay with that because he's grown in other areas. And so these other little things are no big deal. And his family looks good to everyone else in the church. And so, again, there's less motive to work on it.

[6:28] Everybody thinks he's okay, but his wife is wasting away under an unloving and insensitive husband. And their family isn't doing as well as it seems. But since the appearances are good, there's some level of sanctification.

This type of person is content to not be changing. To not be growing. It's sort of plateaued and they're okay with that. I hope that you're not that kind of person that would just settle in and say, you know what, I've gotten as far as I need to in this life and the rest will just wait for glory.

But our authors write, there are many such people in our churches. People who know the Lord but whose lives clearly need change. Yet they live in the Christian community with no sense of urgency or evidence of a personal agenda for growth.

As Christians, they are far too easily satisfied. What about you? Do you have a plan for growth? Do you ever sit down and look at your life and say, this is where I need to be, this is where I am and this is how I'm going to get where I need to be.

I'm going to start working on this. I'm going to start praying and seeking God's face and depending on Him. I'm going to start studying God's Word about this particular area where I'm struggling. Do you ever do that? Do you just sort of stumble along hoping that eventually you'll make it to heaven with some kind of level of holiness and you'll be okay?

[7:43] Are you content with where you are? Are you striving to become more and more like Christ? Less thorns, more good fruit in your life. I know that the Bible teaches contentment and satisfaction with what God has given us.

Godliness with contentment is great gain. But brothers and sisters, ungodliness with contentment will be a ruin. You're ungodly and you're okay with that. That's the kind of contentment that we're not called to.

In this sense, and this is on your handout, God calls you to be dissatisfied. The Christian life is a state of thankful discontent or joyful dissatisfaction.

I live every day thankful for the grace that has changed my life, but I am not satisfied. Why not? Because when I look at myself honestly, I have to admit that I'm not all that I can be in Christ.

In this sense, it is right for me to be discontent. It is right for me to want nothing less than all that is mine in Christ. This isn't a call to hate yourself and to excessive, morbid introspection where we're in despair because of how far short we fall and we're just never going to be what we need to be.

[8:55] It's a call to look at yourself with realism. See where you are and where you need to be and then look to Christ for the grace and strength. Not to dwell in despair that you'll never make it, but to go to the Word of God and to find the help that's there.

To look to Christ who is dwelling in you by His Spirit and to depend upon Him. to give you the grace that you need to change. We must be willing.

This is on your handout also under 2B. Let us examine our lives in light of our hope as new creatures in Christ. That hope is not only based on the promise of forgiveness, but on His promise of personal deliverance and restoration as well.

The same grace that has forgiven me is now in the process of radically changing me. You look at yourself, you see the need for growth, you don't need to despair. God has been good to save you. He's been good to show you His grace in that way. And He'll be good to give you the grace that you need for your sanctification, to become more and more like Christ. He's not going to save you and then leave you to work it out on your own.

[10:00] He's going to continue to give you the grace and help that you need every step of the way. So that's why we've turned to Hebrews 4. In Hebrews 4, we get some of that cross perspective on present grace through which we view the heat of life.

You remember the big picture that we've seen. Heat comes into our lives. Too often we produce thorns. Bad behavior from a bad heart. But when our perspective is one of cross-centeredness, we're centered on Christ and what He has done, then we begin to produce good fruit.

Well, Hebrews 4 gives us some of that perspective looking at life through the lens of the cross. And notice verses 14-16 with me. This is the reality for you as you face heat in this life.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but we have one who has been tempted in every way.

Just as we are, yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

[11:14] This is the strength, the power that you have available to you in the midst of your struggle for holiness. You're not alone. You have a high priest who has been tempted in every way, just like you.

You can't get into a situation and say, well, Jesus never felt heat like this. He did. The difference is, He never responded with the thorns.

He always produced good fruit. But what a comfort to know that that One who did that, who did the impossible for us, is dwelling in us. And that we have access to Him.

That we can approach Him for mercy and grace and help during our times of heat and struggle.

We're not told to stay away and clean up our act and then come to God. No, we come as we are.

We come with confidence knowing that He won't shove us away, that He'll receive us as we are and give us the grace that we need in that moment, in that struggle.

And that should be comforting to us. The change isn't something that you're called to on your own. Jesus is there to walk with you through it and to give you the strength for it.

[12:21] And so let us approach the throne of grace with confidence. And He's praying for us before the Father. What a comfort in the midst of the difficult times that we face in life.

And so that being the case, number three, living like the old man isn't what the new man should be doing. Turn with me to Ephesians 4. If we're new men, we should be putting off the old and put on the new.

Ephesians 4, we'll read verses 17 to the end of the chapter. We could really read the rest of the book. We don't have time to do that or the rest of the letter to the Ephesians.

But see what it says about the old man and the new man. And if you're a new man, a new creature in Christ, then see what it says about how you should be living. Ephesians 4.17 So I tell you this and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do in the futility of their thinking.

They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have

given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with a continual lust for more.

[13 : 39] You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of Him and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds, and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.

And do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands that he may have something to share with those in need.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling, and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you.

[14 : 56] You see the contrast there between the old and the new. As those who have been saved by grace, we should be living like the new man. And you notice that that wicked behavior of the old man is rooted in futile thinking, in a darkened understanding, in ignorance, in hardness of heart, in deceitful desires.

It's not just the outward behavior that's a problem. It's the inward man. It's the heart. It's the way they think that produces these wicked actions. And again, next week we're going to come back and we're going to look at that heart and that darkened understanding and those motives that lie underneath.

But for now, do you see what results from that kind of darkened understanding and that hardened heart? Well, it's thorny behavior. It's every kind of impurity. Lying, anger, stealing, unwholesome talk, fighting, slander, not forgiving one another.

And you still struggle with those things. You know it. And I still struggle with those things. But our author's right. You cannot celebrate the wonderful things that Christ has given you and be content with sin in your life.

You can't be content with those old things. I'm going to read to you just a portion from the book talking about that thorny behavior.

[16 : 08] We know it's still there when we're at the beach and plagued with impure thoughts. Under pressure, we can still avoid the truth, fudge on our taxes or borrow office supplies. We allow ourselves to get angry at friends, parents, spouses, and children and tolerate too much conflict in our lives.

We slander reputations and gossip and withhold from others the forgiveness we so often need ourselves. We all need to ask, where is the old Gentile way? See, he says, no longer live as the Gentiles do.

Where is the old Gentile way, the thorn bush, still evident in our lives? And at the end of your handout, there's some questions that should help you search through where some of this thorny behavior is cropping up in your life.

But that's not how we're to live. We're to live like the new man. In Ephesians 4 and the rest of the book unfolds what that new behavior should look like. It too doesn't come from just behavior, but it comes from a right heart.

A renewed mind. Verse 23. And out of that then comes the good fruit. Produces this changed speak. The way we talk will change. The way we work will work hard.

[17 : 20] Now, instead of being lazy, we'll be kind, we'll be forgiving, we'll have revolutionized relationships with others around us in the world, within our own families, with our spouses, the way we parent our children, relationships in the workplace, relationships in the church.

All of that, if you go on to read Ephesians 5 and 6, those things will change for the new man. There'll be righteousness and holiness will be like God we see in verse 24.

We'll have, by God's grace, success in spiritual warfares. The end of Ephesians 6 goes on to describe that battle that we face in this life.

It won't be easy. That's why Paul calls it warfare. And there's a reason that too many Christians are content with their current level of sanctification, their current level of holiness.

To do something more won't be easy. You know how the pull of the flesh is inside you and it's easy to follow that and it's hard to fight against it. You know what Paul's talking about when he talks about spiritual warfare, how you need that armor.

[18:24] You need that sword. And warfare is tiring. We're a country that's been at war and people are tired of it. It wears you out.

And if you're one of the soldiers that's engaged in that warfare, you're exhausted. It wears down on you and you look and you see there's more war to be waged. And some people want to say, you know what, I'm tired of the battle.

I quit. I'm done. And that's why they get content with where they are in the Christian life because it's too hard. To grow anymore would be too much. Too much work.

But you see, we have this armor of God that He's given to us for the battle. We have Christ to sustain us. The Holy Spirit dwelling in us. So we don't throw in the towel.

We don't allow remnants of the old man to remain. We put them to death by God's grace. None of us, our authors write, has reached our destination yet. So with hope in Christ, we follow, fight, watch, and pray, believing that we can be better tomorrow than we are today.

[19:25] Maybe laziness is one of the thorny behaviors in our life that we need to root out so that we can pursue holiness with greater strength and vigor. Well, let's compare and contrast some thorny responses with fruitful responses under number four there on your handout.

Thornbush responses versus fruit tree responses. And since we're different people with different emotional and physical makeups, we might face the same situation of heat and respond very differently to it.

Someone might sin against me and I might lash out in anger and harsh words. And somebody might sin the same way against you and you just internalize it. You don't say anything, but boy, you just internalize it and you let anger and bitterness build in your heart to that person so you can't even see them.

Now, my behavior is less socially acceptable. People are going to hear you yelling at somebody. When you lash out like that, nobody likes it. And your response of internalizing may look more acceptable, but both of them are equally sinful.

Your thorns might look different than my thorns. And you might face different heat. And different heat will produce different thorny responses in our lives. And so, these are just what we've got here are some categories.

[20:45] And you could put all sorts of responses under these things. So, you all help me. When trouble comes in our lives, what are some of those thorny responses that grow up in our hearts and in our actions as well?

Again, it might be different for you than for me. So, you all share some of the things, some of the thorny responses that you see in yourself and others that happen when we face heat.

Any kind of heat. We talked about the heat last week. But when you face those things, what are the sinful tendencies? The sinful responses that we tend to have.

Why me? What is that victim mentality? I don't deserve this. When in reality, we're recipients of grace. And anything we receive short of punishment is a mercy.

So, why me? There's a sinful response. Dare. Bitterness and anger dwells in our hearts. Some of us spout it out and some of us keep it in. But yes, dare. Yeah, we don't want to think we're really that bad and so we just pretend like it's not that bad.

[21:47] We deny it. And that's one of the categories that they give us here. Good. Anybody here respond in worry and fear when trouble comes into your life? Because I know that I do.

And it's a sinful response because Jesus says do not worry about tomorrow. And Paul writes, be anxious for nothing. Any other responses that are peculiar?

Ed? Hmm. The preemptive strike. Yeah. A sinful response. And then after, do unto others as they have done unto you.

Revenge. Okay? Bob. We just fold and don't deal with the problem. I don't know that you guys are smiling back there like you know something that we don't.

Oh. Oh. Fair enough. Yeah, we respond in different ways. And our authors categorize some of them for us here under these responses.

[22:51] So let's take a look at some of these categories and you'll see some of your responses in them. And look at these things and see where you fall. Which are your tendencies so that you might deal with them?

Not so we can just talk about the thorns that we have and pat each other on the back and say, it's okay, I've got thorns too, you've got thorns, we've all got thorns. No, you look at your thorns and you say, we've got to get rid of these thorns. Let's uproot them. That's why we're looking at them today. One area of response is what Dare mentioned. Denying, avoiding, escaping. It's pretending that everything is fine when it's not. We ignore the problem and different people do that in different ways.

Some people, they just flat ignore it. They pretend like it's not there. Other people bury themselves in something else so that they don't have to deal with it. They just flood their lives with anything except that person, that situation, that problem.

And so they don't deal with it. And some people try to do that with drugs or alcohol. Others do it in more socially acceptable ways, but equally problematic, equally sinful, or dangerous things like escaping into a favorite hobby or entertainment or exercise or work or food or TV or yard work.

[24:03] And I'm not talking about people who do those things as a break from their stressful lives and we need recreation. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about people who do that because they're unwilling to acknowledge and deal with problems in their stressful lives.

And so they just concern themselves with something else entirely. So avoidance, denial, is one sort of response to the trouble that comes. Others magnify it.

They make it bigger than it is. And our authors invent a word for us here. They catastrophize it. They make every little trouble that comes into their life sound like something that's insurmountable, something that's huge that they'll never be able to deal with.

They exaggerate the seriousness or the magnitude of the situation. And some do it to justify their fear. I've really got a reason to be worried and fearful because my problem is so big.

Others do it to gain sympathy. They want people to feel bad for them and to help them. And they begin to look at their whole life as one big suffering event until they can't see all of the manifold blessings that God is showering down on them.

[25:12] All they can see is the trouble. Others become prickly, our authors say, and hypersensitive. Literally, they become thorny. And this person, as they hurt and suffer, begin to carry a chip on their shoulder, looking for offense and trial where there is none.

They write, we allow our hearts to marinate in anger and bitterness and become overly sensitive and prickly. I've been hurt once and it won't happen again. And I think this is helpful if you get a hold of it.

When we haven't taken the Lord as our refuge, we become hypervigilant, scanning our surroundings for possible disrespect or mistreatment. When there's no reason to be looking for it. But you're trusting in the Lord to protect you and keep you. You don't have to have this hypersensitivity. This is the sort of a person that assumes that you have something negative to say, that assumes that you have a grudge against them.

And so when you come up to talk to them, to offer a word of encouragement before it's even partway out of your mouth, they snap at you or they clam up, they walk away. Their defenses are always up because they're assuming the worst.

[26:18] Because they've suffered in the past. And so that's one sinful response. Another is revenge. Someone wronged you and so you're going to return the favor forgetting that God says that vengeance belongs to Him.

And when you take this route, you only further damage your relationship with that person. You damage your relationship to God because you're assuming a role that He reserves for Himself. And for Him alone.

Clearly a sinful response, but one that all too often creeps up in our hearts. Somebody cuts you off in traffic and man, you just want to let them have it. You lay on the horn. You're going to pull up next to them. You're going to let them know because you want revenge for that because they cost you two seconds on the way to work or the game or whatever it is.

That's the thorns in our heart. Others become bogged down or trapped or paralyzed. This is the clammung up that some people do. They don't ignore the trouble so much they shut down because of it.

They stop talking to friends. They stop attending church. They stop reading their Bibles. And it's clearly a dangerous response because they're abandoning the things that could provide them with real help in the midst of their trouble.

[27 : 36] They withdraw from the public and the private means of grace. Jim, those are very real and thorny responses that we have in our hearts. We can either bottle it up or blow up at the person.

But yeah, those things come in those times. There. Like a spouse might be. Sure. Yeah, we can come home and vent our frustrations at someone who's not the source of the frustration.

Amen. Well, that would be all the rest of us too. It's killing the thorny behavior with what's good because of the power of Christ in us. So see, yeah, these are all responses that we see.

Some of us become like Asaph and look around and say, the wicked are prospering and the righteous are suffering. many people, instead of going to the house of the Lord and having their perspective corrected like Asaph did, they withdraw from that.

They withdraw from the one place they need to be and shut down and quit and throw in the towel at least for a time. That's a sinful response. Sometimes we just excuse ourselves and our self-righteousness.

[28 : 53] This is the why me? We think we deserve better. We don't see ourselves as sinners and recipients of grace. We're pretty good people and people should treat us that way.

So when he troubles the evil that comes is either unfair or someone else's fault. So we respond by blaming them. Blaming God, which is clearly a sinful response. Now your tendency might be more in one of these categories than another.

You have to look and examine your own heart and see what's your tendency. Is it to take it out on somebody that's innocent? Is it to take it out on the person that wronged you?

Both of those sinful responses. Is it to just ignore it or to bury your sorrows in ice cream? What is it for you? You narrow it down and pray for grace in pulling those thorns out of your life.

But now let's consider some of the alternative responses that we should be demonstrating in the heat of life. He calls us to repent, to receive Christ's forgiveness and to rely on His power to replace thorn bushes with fruit trees.

[29 : 56] And so here's some fruit tree responses that our authors point us towards. One is to face the reality. Instead of ignoring, denying, avoiding, we face it. And when trouble comes, we don't minimize it and pretend like it's not there.

Pretend like it doesn't bother us. That's living a lie to just go about with this sort of unbiblical stoicism and I'm just going to let whatever happens to me roll off my back.

Jesus was distressed at the things He saw. He had emotional responses to them. He wept at the death of His friend. He mourned over Jerusalem as He saw them rejecting Him. He didn't just say, well, that's how it is and I'm not going to let it affect me because I'm Jesus and I'm above that.

No, He wasn't a stoic and neither should we be. And so, in this class, in this book, I'm not calling you to not have a response. To pretend like you don't have heat in this life.

It's calling us to a biblical response. Jesus wept. We can too. So face your problems realistically. But secondly, do it with the appropriate intensity. It can and should be part of a realistic response, but sorrow must not paralyze us and dominate us and cripple us.

[31 : 10] There's always something bigger than the heartache of the moment. Even if I have been betrayed or lost something precious, my relationship with God, my identity in Christ, the truths of God's Word and the glory of eternity all remain secure and unchallenged.

Our responses, we do respond with emotion, with reality, but we do it understanding that there are greater things that haven't changed, that will not change. And we can find comfort in those things. Respond with alertness. Pay attention in the midst of the trial. See what God is teaching you. What He's revealing about you. What He's showing you of your sinful heart that you hadn't seen before. How He's revealed thorns in your life.

Where is He calling you to repent? You're in the midst of the heat. Don't just despair in the midst of it. Use it as an opportunity to open your eyes and to take a look at your life and say, what is God teaching me through this trial?

Why have I been on the bathroom floor all night just wretchedly sick? And it's hard to think about anything but how miserable you are. But even then maybe, what is God teaching me through this miserable experience?

[32 : 18] Or something far worse than sickness even? How will it make you able to minister God's grace to someone else who's suffering in a similar way on down the road?

Think about that in the midst of your trial. How will it prepare you for the next trial? Suffering is meant to wake us up from spiritual complacency. It is God's work room where He sculpts us into His image.

Thus, it is a time for action, discipline, and perseverance. Don't be so consumed with dwelling on your trial and your miserableness in the midst of it that you miss what God is teaching you.

The good that He has in it for you. Pay attention. Constructive activity to engage in. Our authors write, actions taken in moments of grief and pain are often actions we live to regret.

We panic and run away. We break a relationship. We forsake a commitment. We doubt God. We hurt ourselves. God calls us to do what is good. So in that time of trial, instead of doing those things, you seek God.

[33 : 24] You run to the body of Christ. You find comfort in His Word. You do the normal things that God calls you to do on a day-to-day basis. Are your responses shaped by a heart ruled by the Lord or by the sheer panic of loss?

Trouble comes. We freak out. We don't think about it. And we do something sinful. Some thorny behavior in response. Instead, when trouble comes, our reflex should be, how would the Lord have me respond in this situation?

I'm hurting. I'm suffering. But what does His Word tell me about how I should respond instead of our sometimes instinctive sinful responses? And so we, instead of responding sinfully, do something constructive.

We turn to the Word of God, to God's people for help and guidance in those times. And then, the fifth fruit tree response is to remember.

Remember who you are in Christ. What He is doing for you now. What He's done for you in the past, sustaining you through trials, saving you from your sin. What He's promised to do for you in the future.

[34 : 31] Remember Christ. Remember what we've seen from Hebrews. That we have a high priest who's able to sympathize with our weakness. Tempted in every way like we are. And so we can approach Him with boldness and confidence.

Remember that. Don't forget that in the midst of your trial. You forget that. You're going to be looking to yourself, but you remember, I've got a high priest. I can go to the throne of grace with confidence. And do it. So remember that.

Remember what you know from Hebrews. Remember the other promises of God's Word. That as long as we live in a fallen world, there will be heat. Don't be surprised by it.

Remember that there's going to be heat and trouble in our lives. And that God means to use it for our good. Don't forget that. When we forget that, we begin to question God's goodness. We begin to doubt. We begin to think that He's treating us cruelly, unfairly when we forget that He's using it for our good.

So remember, God has a purpose in it. He means to use it for our growth. For our change. And when we forget, we only hurt ourselves.

[35 : 33] The Israelites, we're experts at forgetting. The disciples, we're experts at forgetting. And when we're honest with ourselves, we too often are experts at forgetting.

Trouble comes and we despair instead of remembering how God helped us through the last trouble. Instead of remembering that trouble is one of the things God is using in our lives, we think that He's hurting us.

In good and bad circumstances, we must ask, what has God called me to do and what has He provided in Christ to enable me to do it? So the trouble comes and you ask yourself that.

What is God calling me to do and then what resources do I have at my disposal, Christ dwelling in me, to do what He's called me to do? And then down at the bottom of your handout are questions that our authors give us to help evaluate your own thorns, your own sinful responses to the trouble in life.

And ask yourself these questions because as long as there are thorns that are sucking up the nutrients that you need to produce good fruit, then that fruit's not going to thrive. So work at identifying the thorns and I need to work at identifying the thorns in my life and uprooting those things so that the fruit can grow and thrive in our lives.

[37:03] We only do it by God's grace. I want to finish with a quote from the book, the way the authors end this chapter for our encouragement today.

I don't mean to discourage you by talking about thorns and our sinful behavior. May God use it to spur us on to greater holiness, to live like the new creations that we are.

And so our authors write, I can admit my faults with no need to minimize, hide, or give way to paralyzing guilt. I can confess that I need to grow without beating myself up.

I can cry out when life is hard but accept responsibility for the way I deal with it. I don't have to cover my sin, polish my reputation, and keep a record of my successes.

I can look at my tomorrows with enthusiasm and hope. Yes, I am still a flawed person in a broken world, but my view of myself is not dark and depressed because the Gospel has infused it with hope.

[38:02] Christ is with me and in me, and I will never be in a situation where He isn't redemptively active. You're never going to be at a spot in your life where Christ isn't working for your good, working redemptively in your life.

Though change is needed in many ways, I am not discouraged. I'm in the middle of a work of personal transformation. This process is often painful but always beneficial. When you examine yourself and expose the thorn still in your life, believe that you can bear good fruit even though you live under the burning heat of difficulty.

And your surprise, pain, and disappointment don't run away from your Redeemer. He cares and understands and He offers mercy and grace in a form fit for the changes that need to take place in you.

You see your thorns, don't give up. You've got the Savior who knows and understands and has what you need to work the change in your life. So may God encourage us, may He challenge us, may He show us the sins still in our lives and give us the grace to uproot it.

Amen. We're dismissed.