

Parasites

Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them
(Matt 13:7).

My mother has a small tree in her yard that has become the “host” for a parasitic plant. The vine wrapped itself around every branch of the tree and was killing it. Last week, my mother asked me to try to rescue the tree. During the process of cutting out the vine, I learned some interesting things about parasites. (Of course, since I barely know the difference between a rose and a dandelion, my education started at a very elementary level. Don’t read further if you are expecting any advanced botanical training.)

1. I learned that parasites start small. When my mother moved into this trailer, the vine was very small. Mom wasn’t worried because the tree was so much larger than the vine. But within a few years, the vine had wrapped itself so tightly around the tree that it took hard work to save the tree.

2. I learned that parasites rob nutrients from the host. Yardwork is not on my top ten list of fun activities, so my first suggestion was, “Just ignore it. It will probably go away.” However, my mother quickly informed me that her tree was dying because the vine was sapping needed nutrients from the tree. You can’t have both a healthy tree and a destructive parasite.

3. I learned that parasites may be appealing. To my untrained eye, the parasite was just as pretty as the tree. Parasites do not come with a label marked, “Dangerous!”

4. I learned that parasites will come back if you are not vigilant. After what seemed like hours of sweaty manual labor (about 20 minutes by the clock), the tree was parasite free! Wonderful; we are done. But... the parasite will try again. Even if I dig out the roots, a seed can be carried by a bird or on the wind. Mom will need to keep watching for new growth.

While working on mom’s gardening project, I began thinking about Jesus’ parable of the Sower and the Soils. Jesus warned that some plants can be choked out by weeds and thorns (Matt 13:7). Notice:

The ground is not bad ground. It is productive soil; plants grow well in this soil.

The seed is not bad seed; it produces a crop.

The thorns are not necessarily sinful practices; they are simply “the cares of the world” (Matt 13:22).

Satan would love to see us abandon our faith and live in willful and open sin. If he cannot take us to this extreme, Satan will try to drown out God’s best for us with attractive, beautiful, *and not necessarily sinful* parasites. If he can get us too busy for a consistent, meaningful devotional life, we will start to die spiritually for a lack of nutrition. If he can keep us so involved in the cares of this life that we become detached from our local church, we will fail to build meaningful relationships with other believers. If he can keep us too busy to witness, we will fail to answer God’s call to make disciples.

How will this happen? How will parasites attack our spiritual life?

1. They will start small. We will not say, “I’ve decided to quit having devotions.” We will simply rush through our time with God because we are behind schedule for the day. We won’t say, “I’m quitting church.” We will simply become careless in attendance and less attentive when we are there.
2. They will rob us of spiritual nutrition. We will begin to weaken spiritually as these parasites steal our time and attention. We will become increasingly susceptible to temptation. We will lose our spiritual edge.
3. They will be appealing. Satan knows you well. He will tempt you with things that are attractive. The parasite that he uses to sap your spiritual strength will be something that seems good. For many of us, becoming too busy doing good things is a greater temptation than “bad things.” If he cannot tempt you to open willful sin, he will try to overwhelm you with so many attractive good activities that your spiritual life is drowned out.
4. They will try to come back. Killing the parasites that Satan brings into our life isn’t a “once and done” choice. Our spiritual life requires daily attention. Again, spiritual parasites are not willful choices to commit sin; they are distractions, “the cares of the world,” that creep into the lives of the best of people.

If we want to be fruitful, if we want to grow spiritually, if we want to have the best God wants for us, we must remain vigilant. We must watch for the “little things” that sap our spiritual strength. Don’t let the thorns of daily life kill the fruit that God intends you to bear.