

Russell Kelfer

Other Things Entering In

#1356-B

Series: The Parables of Scripture

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

Other Things Entering In

WHY, OH WHY IS MY LIFE NOT CHANGED?

The most difficult thing most of us have to do in the Christian life is simply to make it work in the real world. We can come together on Sunday morning, get convicted of our sins, get encouraged in our walk, make definite commitments about specific areas of need in our lives, and go home either refreshed or challenged.

It is then that reality sets in. Too often, what we intended to happen doesn't, and we return the next Sunday for another "fix" and another time of exposure to perhaps a different area of need, when we have really done nothing about what we heard the week before.

Is it any wonder that after a few months or years go by, we tend to become somewhat insulated in our walk with God? We tend to be slower to make commitments, less likely to have expectations. It isn't because we doubt that *God can do what He says*. It usually isn't because we don't mean business.

What is it then? *Well, things keep happening.* The phone rings. The mail comes. The virus, the dental emergency, the car breakdown, Aunt Susie's appendectomy, Bennie's trip to the ER, Sammy's soccer finals. They just keep happening. And well, you know, time runs out. There are only twenty-four hours in every day, and for me to spend the time with God I need to, or to be faithful in that mentoring relationship I promised, I need every one of those twenty-four and then some. So, when all these intrusions come, it just doesn't get done.

I mean to be more faithful in Scripture memory, you say, but when? I want to be accountable, you cry, but every week something happens. We need more time together as a family, you may be thinking; but you are running so fast, you don't even realize you haven't had it until it's over.

Time. The great enemy of good intentions. Intrusions. The

Other Things Entering In

great excuse we give for having no time. How did Jesus do it? And what does Jesus expect of us? Surely, you may be thinking, *He understands my dilemma.*

Indeed He does. He also understands what it is doing to your Christian life. And He described it for us 2,000 years ago as He sat, facing a sandy beach, preaching to a seaside gathering from a borrowed boat. He was speaking in parables, in word pictures, and the subject was farming.

His concerns, however, were not agricultural in nature, they were spiritual. The farming analogy was simply a way to communicate so that those who had ears to hear could hear. And if you are a believer, beloved, *you have ears to hear.*

The Master was explaining why some people never seem to grow much in their Christian life; why the fruit of the Spirit never seems to become dominant in their personality; why year after year goes by and the level of spiritual maturity seems to remain constant, at best. He is using the blackboard of soil conservation as a backdrop, and the different kinds of soil as pictorial images of the human heart.

His first picture was of those who were illustrated by the soil by the side of the road. It was trampled underfoot as people walked by, and the birds would come and eat it up, for the soil was so hard, the seed just stayed on the surface. It never got to the heart.

His second picture was one of soil that looked good, but had no depth. As soon as the roots needed room to withstand the pressures of life, they hit hard rock and withered. Once again, no fruit.

His third image has been of the most interest to us, for it is more a picture of the average Christian who is busily going through the motions of Christian experience: attending church, studying his or her Bible, maybe even being mentored or disciplined, *but the end result is still most unsettling.* Oh, there's some growth, some change. But the long-range potential for Sammy Saint or Suzie Spiritual to really grow into Christ's likeness and make a decided difference in their world seems discouraging.

Jesus is painting a picture of good soil and good seed and virtually no fruit. The soil is rich, deep, and fertile. The seed is ample, well-sown, and watered. No problems there. It is Mr. or

Other Things Entering In

Mrs. Average Evangelical, all the outward exposure to spiritual food; but if you could look in on the family, you would not see a great deal of difference year by year. What's wrong?

The Master tells us that though the seed and soil lack nothing, the farmer is too busy to tend to the weeds that are choking the root system—the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things entering in are choking the word. It's time to dig up the stuff that's doing the destroying, or the whole thing will be infested before long.

We have looked in some detail at the cares of this world, (life's normal burdens) and the deceitfulness of riches (life's temporal pursuits). It is time to examine that last statement made in the Mark passage that seems so all-encompassing, yet so hard to define. These weeds are referred to as *other things entering in*. That phrase *other things* can best be translated *everything else*, and the word *entering* is the Greek word εἰσπορευομαι *eisporeuomai* {ice-por-yoo'-om-ah-ee}. It speaks of affections entering the soul. They are like unexpected intrusions that sneak in and occupy space once designated for another.

The *other things entering in* refers to the uninvited, unexpected intrusions that occupy our lives so much of the time. Most of them are good things. Some of them are excellent things. But somehow, Satan seems to see to it that the timing of them is just disruptive enough to keep us from focusing on that which is best. Some of them may surprise you. They may be the very things you thought were your allies, but they may actually be stealing from you the weed killers that will make the garden of your life grow. Let's take a walk through the field of your heart and see what's killing the fruit.

WHERE, OH WHERE DO THE HOURS GO?

It all seems to come down to time. The clock moves too fast, and the sun goes down hours before we've had time to do everything we had planned. It isn't that we don't have time-savers. We have beepers beeping, cell phones phoning, faxes faxing, e-mail mailing, computers computing, and with all the multitude of time-saving devices at our disposal, we seem to have less time than ever. Part of it is because it takes so much time to tend to the time-savers. But it is much more than that. At best, our modern contraptions help us to break even. They require just about as much attention and create just about as

Other Things Entering In

much distraction as they help. An even exchange is all we can hope for, but that still doesn't solve the problem. The problem is: Where, oh where do the hours go? The answer is: They go where we spend them, but we have simply lost control of where we spend them.

The concept of time is not new to God, He created it. Before He created it, life was as it will be in eternity. God created it for our benefit, and He has designed it to be used as a template over which we are to suspend our priorities. The word *time* is used 573 times in the King James Bible. They cover a variety of words, but all of them have to do with the root concept, which is one of the organization of life into measurable units: years into months, months into weeks, weeks into days, days into hours, etc. By doing this, God allowed man a way to measure his own lifestyle and a way to visualize God's faithfulness. An example is

His compassions fail not, they are new every morning. Great
is thy Faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:23)

Every time the sun rises, God has sent a reminder of His faithfulness, a new day. He appointed yearly feasts, weekly rituals, daily tasks to give life a sense of order; for He is a God of order.

To each of us He gave a daily gift. That gift is 24 hours. It is, whether we realize it or not, life's great equalizer. Everyone has the same amount, and no one will ever have less. For the sake of examining the problem, let's take that gift and examine what we do with it. Granted, the variables are so many, this lesson will not hold them all, *so we will deal in broad categories*. Do not be offended if you do not exactly fit the categories.

Let's begin: We each have 24 hours every day. That means that in one week, there are 168 hours of time gifted to us. Some things seem to be givens, and others seem to be intended, so we will take an average and see how many hours are fixed, so to speak. It would look something like this:

Work	48	(assuming six days shalt thou labor)
Sleep	56	(assuming 8 hrs/night)
Eat	14	(2 hrs per day for 3 meals)
Spoken for	118	(hours per week)

That would mean that 118 hours are spoken for, leaving 50 hours for us to use to live the rest of our lives. Now, suppose you

Other Things Entering In

are a believer who wants to spend time with God and with His people. Let's add two items to our must list.

Time with God	7	(assuming an hour per day)
Work	48	(assuming six days shalt thou labor)
Sleep	56	(assuming 8 hrs/night)
Eat	14	(2 hrs per day for 3 meals)
Church	5	(hours per week)
<hr/>		
Spoken for	130	hours per week

Now you may argue with some or all of the fixed numbers, but they are, in general terms, adequate and then some. That leaves each of us 38 hours per week or more than 160 hours per month in which to accomplish the rest of life's tasks.

It is, incidentally, not a fair world. The single parent with three children has only 38 hours left to care for her family, clean her house, do her laundry, and tend to a multitude of various repairs and activities, while still trying to maintain her spiritual growth. The retired person, on the other hand may have the same amount of time, with a great many hours unspoken for which he or she must fill up using God's priority check list. This chart is for those of us in the middle, a working man or woman with a mate to share the remaining hours and divide at least some of the remaining tasks. Those hours may include a lot of car-pooling, doctor's appointments, telephoning, meetings, bookkeeping, and a variety of kinds of recreation and relaxation. The issue is: for most of us, we simply run out of time.

We mean well, and we schedule things often with good intentions, but other things enter in and they take precedence. What Jesus is saying in this parable is that *these other things entering in*, though apparently harmless, are killers in disguise, and unless we slow down, reschedule our lives, learn to recognize which are weeds and which are not, we will go through the whole planting season, wait on the spring rains, watch the green sprouts begin to push their heads against the stubborn dirt, *and never realize that the entire crop is poisoned with thorny weeds, that simply, quietly, entered in*. They looked so harmless. They seemed so green. Some of them even carried the Spiritual Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval: they were *church activities*. But they choked the word. They took that life-producing, life-changing seed that was destined to break into a blossom of beauty at any moment, *and just as it reached the*

Other Things Entering In

point of blooming, the lusts of other things entering in choked it, and nothing happened. Remember, you have one basic reason for living: to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ until your life spills over and transforms the lives of all you touch. The issues we are discussing will be more needful for some than for others. Most of us are affected by them, however, in some measure.

For the remainder of this lesson and at least one more, we are going to look at some of the things that choke the word in our lives. Then we will conclude, I pray, by looking at some Scriptural principles about time, looking at the possibility of tearing down the template we have allowed Satan to erect in our lives and rebuild it with one that is wrapped in the mantle of the Master. For now, however, *what are some of the things that choke the word?*

ADDICTED TO PEACOCKS, WINDOWS, AND EYES

To begin, we are a generation addicted to peacocks, windows, and eyes. The peacocks and eyes, of course, are symbolic of NBC and CBS; the windows, a symbol of Microsoft; but all are symbolic of something our forefathers never knew. Granted, they bring us the ingathering of the information age, but they also bring us a mesmerized generation of people who spend an average of 30 hours a week gazing at some kind of a lighted screen, whose task it is to educate or entertain us, for the most part, with little or no action or interaction on our part. Add to that the electronic barrage of CD's, cassettes, video games, and VCR's, and all we have to do is sit and vegetate, and by some kind of osmosis, become filled up much as you would a car at the gas station.

I know, there can be great benefits from both television and the internet. But get real. 99% of what both produce are not only not transforming you into the likeness of Jesus Christ, they are subtly, or not so subtly filling your heart and mind with concepts and principles that defy and deny everything God said in His word.

One evening of television (three hours) will pour into our subconscious minds by default, approval of alternate lifestyles, adultery, murder, envy, pornography, and idolatry, while subtly ridiculing every semblance of authority and holiness. We laugh at the plots and the characters while assuring our children we disapprove of everything we're watching. They must wonder

Other Things Entering In

why we protesteth so much and watcheth so much at the same time.

We will then arise the next morning, head for Bible Study and wish we had somehow had more time to really study and to prepare our hearts, but somehow the time was just not there. Of course it wasn't there. *The lust of other things entered in*—how did it happen? What might we have done to prevent it? It is a pattern, we answer, and *everybody does it*.

No, beloved, everybody doesn't; but most people do. As to how to prevent it, you determine that once and for all you are going to set priorities for your life and become accountable for those priorities. Before you can ever succumb to that which is natural, you are going to be sure that you have been faithful to that which is supernatural. This lesson will not have as many verses as usual. We are talking much as we would, friend to friend. But I want to give you the first verse that will govern the weed problem in your garden. I want you to memorize it if you don't know it, and review it if you do, this week. It is this:

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God *is* with thee whithersoever thou goest.

(Joshua 1:8,9)

I want you to tape that verse in letters ½ inch wide on the front of that electronic marvel that so occupies your time and so influences your deepest convictions, whether you think it does or not. Only when you feel you have obeyed that verse for that day will you untape the verse and plug in the set. The verse has three commandments: The are "M,M, and O"

The first "M" is memorize. It must not depart from your mouth. That means you have it on the tip of your tongue. The second "M" is meditate. To meditate is to personalize and emphasize over and over what that verse says to you. You are to do that for a specific period of time. Day and night. The rest of the time you're on your own. The "O" stands for observing to do, or obeying *whatever the word has told you to do*. Only then will the weeds be under control. If you have time to do anything else, but not time to do

that, *other things are entering in.*

THE BUSINESS OF BUSYNESS

The prioritization of time with God and the appropriation of His Word are the beginning points of the weed-pulling exercise. But they are only a beginning. The next step is take the cruise control that governs the speed of the vehicles of our lives and readjust the maximum. We have been overcome by the business of busyness. It's a big business, and Satan is the CEO. Most of us are running too fast to hear God speak, and running too fast to hear people cry. We have been swept up in the beeper generation and are unconsciously certain that the more we do and the faster we do it, the more spiritual we've become, or at the least, the more productive we are.

The modern mother's biography could be entitled, "My Life on Loop 410" by Harriet, the Harried Housewife. Living in the Suburban Generation, most mothers today think that tending her flock means yielding to every request her children have; and if Johnny next door is playing soccer, then your little Brucie has to play soccer, too. If Marianne's best friend is taking piano lessons, then your little darling needs to tickle the ivories, too. No matter that she has no talent, no interest, and no time.

So Mother becomes a mini-Greyhound bus driver, planning her day's itinerary by the stops she has to make, leaving no room for the crises that are sure to arise, and leaving room only for her favorite recipe at the end of the day, Hamburger Helper #2345, a la microwave 6 minutes and serve.

Dad becomes a willing accomplice, and his job is to pick up what and who mom has dropped off, and quiet the noisy crew while the microwave pops and the table is set. All of life seems to be marked by the pressure of not enough time. We keep adding more and more jobs, more and more projects, more and more activities, and then when some visiting preacher comes along and tells us we need to spend more time with God, we agree, so we do, *but we do it at the same speed and with the same disconnected mentality that we do everything else.* And of course, after a little time goes by, new activities or old undone tasks rear their ugly heads, *and we go back to business as usual.* What happened? *Other things entered in.*

Many of these activities are important. I don't minimize that

Other Things Entering In

for a moment. But, oh, so often, activity is a substitute for reality. And reality is only realized *when we are still*. Today's family does not, for the most part, know what it means to be still. We do not have a grasp on the concept, let alone any experience. Have you ever wondered why, with all of the interactive media and the three-dimensional videos we have, the world will still stop and stand in awe of a still painting? Why? Because the multi-dimensional, fast-paced media presentation can't take the place of standing still, looking at the grandeur of a mountain, or grant the refreshment of seeing a still painting of someone beside a flowing brook.

Life was designed, on occasion, to stand still. God kept painting those still paintings in Scripture to remind us. When the pressures build, and the forces that intrude surround you, remember this verse:

Ye shall not *need* to fight in this *battle*: set yourselves, stand ye *still*, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD *will be* with you.

(II Chronicles 20:17)

When it's time for your quiet time, be sure your heart stops as well as your body. Slow down and pray:

Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.

(Psalm 4:4)

When you begin to doubt if God is in control, and the world news frightens you and your own private newscast seems out of control, as well, remember:

Be still, and know that I *am* God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

(Psalm 46:10)

When you begin to question the need to stop the frantic chase you are caught up in, and wonder why God would slow you down, remember

He leadeth me beside still waters. He restoreth my soul.

(Psalm 23:2,3)

And finally, when life is simply rushing past you, and you have forgotten where peace comes from, call on Him to settle the storm and restore the stillness to your life:

And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

(Mark 4:39)

Other Things Entering In

A great calm. What an incredibly refreshing thought. Time moving along again at only sixty ticks a minute. Life moving again at a reasonable pace without digital numbers flashing at you as though they signaled your ultimate demise if you did not accomplish a certain number of activities by the time the beeper went beep, or the buzzer went buzz.

What are we running for? Or better still, *what are we running from?* Like Adam and Eve in the garden, we may not be sure. God called to them as He always had one day, and they responded:

And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him,
Where *art* thou? (Genesis 3:8-9)

Where are you, Adam? Where are you, Bill? Where are you, Jenny? And what are you running from? What are we running from? I don't believe we have become caught up in the madness marathon because we meant to. I believe that we, for the most part, want to be the best parents, the best employees, the best Christians we can, and as the world turns faster, we run faster to keep up, thinking that the more we do, the more likely we are to succeed. Remember, *God told us how to succeed*. He said we are to meditate in His word day and night and observe to do all that is written therein. Then...*we shall have good success*.

Success has been redefined by the world and then the path to it has been accelerated by Satan to a fevered pitch so we won't slow down long enough to see where we're running to, and what we're running from. It's time for some of us to get off the train at the next station and refocus the lens of our lives on quality, rather than quantity; on fellowship with God, rather than on frenzied activity.

In our next study, we will continue our look at the *things that enter in*. We'll conclude our look at the business of busyness, take a glance at when margin becomes a mirage, and hopefully have time to examine some of our not so magnificent obsessions. Our prayer is that we might conclude by setting up a template of priorities with which to govern at least some of our farming decisions, so that we don't come to harvest time and wonder why that precious crop *almost came up, but other things entered in...*

Other Things Entering In

thorny weeds they were... and what was almost a bumper crop turned into just another sea of tangled weeds.

For now, however, I ask that you do two things this week. Your assignment is being included in the lesson instead of printed as an extra sheet on the back. Here it is:

1- Take one week and unplug the television set and sign off the internet. Turn off the Nintendo and the boom box. Take a minimum of one hour per day and do nothing but worship God, study His word, and memorize and meditate on Scripture. Start with Joshua 1:8,9. When you can, add Deuteronomy 11:18-21. It goes like this:

Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes.

And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates:

That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth.

When was the last time you carefully studied that passage? It gives you a workable plan for living as a family. Look at it:

Step One: No matter your occupation, make it your preoccupation to devote the rest of your life to the word of God. Not to a casual reading of it. Not only to an occasional study of it. You are to lay them up in your heart and in your soul. To lay them up in your heart, you memorize them. To lay them up in your soul, you internalize them. You make them such a part of your life *that it would never enter your mind to do anything contrary to what they teach. Never.* Every waking moment is to be the Word time. While you wait for the bus, while you wait for the doctor, while you watch for the kids to come out of school, you memorize, review, and meditate on the Word of God.

Step Two: The Word becomes as frontlets between your eyes. You place it where any kind of intrusion might distract you. You place it on a tape and listen as you drive. You put it on the front of that television set, as we mentioned earlier. You place it on the

Other Things Entering In

night stand beside your bed. You put it on cards and carry it in your pocket. You place it on the table where you'll see it as you eat. You don't work the Word into your daily routine, you build your daily routine around the Word. The difference may seem slight, but it's not. It's everything.

Step Three: You make the Word of God the standard conversation in your home. You relate the daily news to the Word of God. You relate behavior and relationships to the Word of God. You talk of it when you walk by the way, when you rise up, when you retire. It should be the first thing on your lips when you get up and the last thing in your heart as you go to sleep. Otherwise, beloved, *other things will enter in and choke it out.*

So you make God's Word everything, and you stop allowing the world's toys to attract your eyes off of the sentinel of eternity that is calling you from its pages to a whole different kind of life and a whole different frame of reference. It isn't that we don't believe what we hear on Sunday. It's that Monday through Saturday, we so often fill our hearts with the *exact opposite* and wonder what's choking the Word. *It's other things entering in.*

The first assignment, then, is to take a week and turn off the peacock, the windows and the eye and turn it into Word week. By God's grace, you may not ever want to plug that monster in again. But there's one more assignment:

2- Slow down the express train of your life in whatever ways you can this week. Take a deep breath, and be still. If you have to miss a meeting, be sensitive to the leadership, but miss it. If you have to miss a Bible Study, do so considerately, but do whatever you have to do to stop the treadmill from running at high speed. In our next lesson, we will address some of the hard choices that entails. For one week, however, *do whatever it takes to smell the roses of life and see the still pictures of life one more time.*

The world won't stop if you miss a soccer game or a committee meeting or even a luncheon. Do whatever it takes to refocus the lens of your heart on who God is, not on what you have to do. You will return to most of those activities the next week, and some of them you can't possibly avoid this week. Do what you can without needlessly affecting others. And for one week, don't say yes to any new jobs or involvements.

The reason for the slowdown is not to give you more time for recreation. It is to give you more time to look at God, listen

Other Things Entering In

to God, and listen to people. We have become so hurried in our generation that people all around us, *including our own families*, are crying to be heard, but we can't slow down long enough to listen. Take an hour and sit in the yard and worship and sing. Take an hour and drive into the country to pray. Stop in the middle of the day and just go outside and watch the flowers grow, the clouds roll by, the wind whisper through the trees. Take time to listen to everything everyone says to you for one week. Not just with your ears, with your heart. Whatever you do, dedicate this week to taking a fresh look at the pace of your life. Then, Lord willing, next lesson we will look at some things we can do about it.

It's weed-pulling time, beloved, and the harvest can go either way. God wants to produce fruit. Satan wants *other things to enter in*. He doesn't care whether they are good things or bad things. All he cares about is interrupting the process of reproducing the image of Christ in our lives. He will use common, ordinary interruptions. He will, in fact, use *the very things that society calls normal, and convince you that for you to get off the train and focus on the word with all your heart will make you a fanatic*.

Guess what? It will.

And that, Beloved, *is just what God is looking for*.

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