

# God, Man, & MAMMON

Navigating the tension between  
the material and the spiritual

Chapter II



*with*  
Mitch  
Anthony

## IN THIS ISSUE

### Realizing Your Greatest Potential

With the parable of The Sower, Jesus explains how the same “seed” can produce varied results. Like the “good seed,” we are to pursue the ever-lasting.



## MATTHEW 13:8–15 (NIV)

*"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 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. This is the seed sown along the path."*

*'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. 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.'*

*'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.'*

*'But 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.'*

## REALIZING YOUR GREATEST POTENTIAL

Jesus is being transparent about what causes His work to fail. The enemy's subterfuge and cunning erode the Holy Spirit's work in many a man's soul. He is describing His competition in vivid detail. Even if you sincerely desire to hear the truth, there are distracting forces and conflicting messages afoot designed to divert your attention elsewhere. In this accessible agrarian parable Jesus is telling his disciples that the enemy has methodical blueprints for destroying seed and sowing weeds in men's hearts. The adversarial patterns and wiles are:

If they don't quite understand—*Whisper doubts, they will give it up.*

### ***The Seed lost to immediate doubt and lack of comprehension.***

People hear something that resonates in their hearts but are quickly rattled by contradicting theories, rupturing their brief moment of clarity. A doubting whisper does the job.

If they do understand and are excited—*Send persecution their way, they will run to the shadows with their faith.*

### ***The Seed lost to a need for approval.***

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These people take it a step further and are genuinely excited about what is happening in their life. They take it far enough to tell others and are confused that others are not genuinely excited for them and their new lease on life. The lack of approval coupled with a lack of personal independence, combines to form a state that Jesus described as “rootless.” They dry up, wither, and are blown away.

If they embrace the message and seek to grow—*burden them with material anxiety and advertise the payoffs of riches, they will believe in God but be unproductive for Heaven’s purposes.*

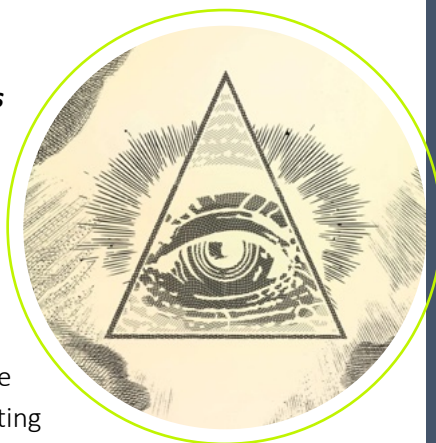
***The Seed grows but is eventually lost to life’s cares and material forces.***

Deceitful promises of wealth eventually drown out the promises of following Jesus. This is an especially sad scenario because the seed *has* developed and grown, but the draw of the world systematically dulls the heart and anesthetizes the desire to grow spiritually.

If they understand and seek to practice the truth—*use temptation, trials, and tragedy to impede production. An avid believer will either fight through troubles and keep their spiritual perspective or shrink to the background shadows because of the problems.*

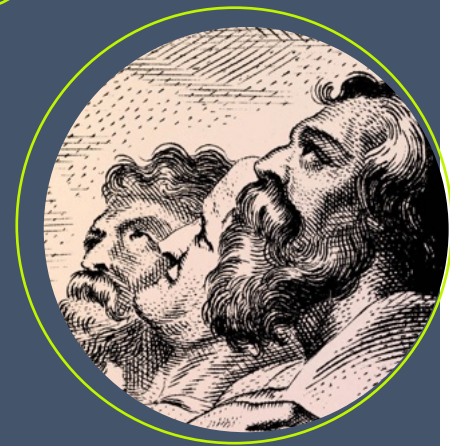
***The Seeds flourish to varying degrees of return.***

Some seeds produce 30x the original investment, some 60x, and others 100x. These people are not distracted or fooled by material noise and temporal sideshows. They are reflective and perceptive types who are investing their lives toward an eternal reward.



The odds shake out as follows: One in four produces anything over time. Categories 1–3 fail to produce for lack of understanding, affirmation and commitment. A small percentage will produce to their full potential. Category 4 produces to varying degrees. Spiritual production, impacting others’ lives, is what God is after. Self-centeredness, shrinking vision and spiritual impotence are what the enemy is after. There are three chief sources of impediment toward a spiritually productive life outlined in this parable. Think of Jesus’ message being seed capital that has been sown into your life. The following forces of life are responsible for hindering the growth of that seed capital. These three visceral forces are ubiquitous on this planet:

THE FLOURISHING  
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AN ETERNAL  
REWARD.



- The need for approval;
- The busyness of life;
- Material possibilities.

Who does not feel some need for approval? We are all concerned about getting things done and also are keenly aware of the need for money to live. I have and do experience all three of these forces in my own walk of life. I have wondered why the world did not approve some of my ideas at times and enjoyed it when they did embrace them. I have become so busy in doing what I do that I lost sight of the greater treasure, which is attending to my own spiritual growth. I have been entranced by material possibilities at times and been thrown off of paths that would produce more lasting fruit. We must all wrestle with these three forces that compete for our spirit's attention.

The desire for material advancement plays and preys on a global scale, but some personalities are, by nature, more susceptible to its influence. Often it is those people who are blessed with drive and energy, the world's innate movers and shakers, would-be heroes, crusaders against injustice, philanthropists, and humanitarians that end up forsaking things of eternal magnitude for a pretentious

bauble. A bauble was a mock scepter of the throne carried by court jesters, a pretense of power and importance. It had a comedic effect—a fool carrying a symbol of royalty. The illusions of wealth can become this false scepter in our lives if we are naive toward money's specious promises.

Those who put too much stock in the promises of wealth risk becoming people who, instead of doing a world of good with their lives, are pulled into lives of intensified self-gratification. We have all known many such people in our lives. People with recognizable talent and a passion for doing good who were pulled into the rat-race of material competition. They either grew tired of seeing others advance beyond them materially or grew discouraged with their own efforts to make a difference. The obsessive pursuit of stuff at the expense of spirit is just another example of the ever-lasting bowing to the never-lasting.



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How do we describe a force potent enough to cause the spiritually converted and the intellectually convinced to back down from their faith and redirect their lives? Jesus described it as the “deceitfulness of riches.” Deceit is typically one teaspoon of truth mixed into a cup of trickery. From our youth we are inculcated of all that money can do throughout our lives. The logic we are taught comes off as axiomatic; we should pursue all the wealth we can, money answers almost all, money will buy you autonomy and increase your independence from those you’d rather avoid, it will help you to secure your existence and live your dreams, it will make you important and help you rise above the frantic fray.

It takes more than just money to solve life’s spiritual and emotional dilemmas. Yes, money can buy you freedom but what if we turn around and use that freedom to support a less fruitful life. This was always my thought as I watched well-heeled and early retired men while away their existence playing and drinking gin every day at the local country club. They had enough money to do as they pleased and what they chose was a pleasure path void of significance. Jesus is alerting us to this type of trap in his caveat on the “deceitfulness of riches.” Money promises to do an awful lot in our lives but it doesn’t always pan out as expected. The short-list of deceitful promises money makes would have to include the following:

You’ll be safe;

You’ll be secure;

You’ll have peace of mind;

You’ll be somebody;

There is an intractable problem with the promises money makes—it cannot deliver on most of them. Let’s examine each promise of money assumed by our culture against the reality that people experience and judge how well financial assurances hold up. In the next chapter we’ll make a closer examination of money’s little white lies that may aid us in better understanding what is meant by the “deceitfulness of riches.”



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