# Chapter 1

1. **In what ways might a person be misled by observing only the physical world and remaining ignorant of the spiritual world? Consider Hebrews 11:1,27; 1 John 4:20.**

Nothing seemed right. The stone was too light, pebbles too smooth. The soil didn’t dirty his hands. Everything beyond arm’s reach appeared … flat-like pictures on the pages of a storybook. Things seemed real enough up close, but the farther a tree or a rock was from him, the less real it appeared.

Focusing only on what is visible tends to make us think the material world is supremely important. We live as though temporary things like money, career, or earthly circumstances matter most while we give comparatively little attention to eternal realities like Judgment Day, the Second Coming, eternal reward, and God himself.

1. **2 Corinthians 4:17-18 calls us to fix our eyes on the unseen. What would be a specific, practical example of that in an everyday situation?**

When someone sins against me and I feel anger or vengeance rising in my heart, I could focus my attention on the promises of reward for loving my enemy (Mt.5:44-46). Or I could remind myself that God’s vengeance/discipline will be far more effective than mine if I don’t crowd it out by taking my own vengeance (Ro.12:19).

Both solutions require faith. As John Piper says, “Hold a grudge, doubt the judge.”

1. Unbelievers live as though what they experience with their senses is all there is, ignoring spiritual realities. What are some ways that approach to life produces sin? See Psalm 73:2-4;13-17; Proverbs 7:21-23;9:17-18)

Failing to understand the ultimate destiny of the righteous and the wicked can result in envying unbelievers who prosper in this life and doubting God’s justice and goodness.

Failing to understand the devastating consequences of sin causes us to fall to temptation because our eyes are on the immediate pleasure. The devastating results are often invisible and unknowable apart from biblical warnings. It seems like I’ll be able to get away with a small indulgence, no one will ever know, and it won’t hurt me in any significant way.

In the distance, purple, red, and yellow rays shot upward. And there were other colors-colors he had never seen. They were rising from … an old, ramshackle cottage. ... they moved, shimmering like light reflecting off water. No, not like water. This movement was different. Like the movement of a living thing.

1. What are some factors that determine how much of God’s glory you will be able to see in his Word? See Luke 8:18; Jeremiah 29:13; Psalm 119:18; Matthew 13:15.

Some days you read the Bible and it’s delightful, satisfying, soul-changing communion with God. Other times it’s just print on a page. Why? There are numerous factors that determine how much of God’s presence you will experience when reading his Word.

One is the degree of earnestness in your heart (Jer.29:13). Think of the Tom Hanks character stranded on an island in the movie *Cast Away*. He finds it impossible to break a coconut open, but when it becomes a matter of life or death, he persists until he finds a way to get through the shell to the nourishment inside. God’s Word is like that. Sometimes it takes desperate searching before we crack through to the insights that will open windows of enlightenment.

Another factor is the sovereign decision of God. If the Holy Spirit doesn’t open your eyes, you will not be enlightened by the Word no matter how hard you study. So we must pray the prayer of Ps.119:18.

A third factor is the attitude of our hearts (Mt.13:15). There are some truths I don’t really want to be true because they make demands on me that I don’t like (such as loving the person who just hurt me). There are countless different attitudes that can dull our heart’s ability to receive God’s Word. We must constantly keep our hearts soft to whatever God wants to teach us.

I agree with the other comments. No other book could nourish God.

#### Dig Deeper – God’s Word

1. *Why is it so hard to see the glory of God? See 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Romans 1:18.*

One reason it’s hard for unbelievers is the fact that Satan is actively working to blind them (2 Cor.4:4) and they do not have the Spirit’s help in combating this (1 Cor.2:14). In addition to Satan’s work, our own sinful flesh works to suppress the truths we don’t want to accept (Ro.1:18).

1. *In what sense is the Word of God “living”? See Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:23.*

No other book could nourish your soul every single day, decade after decade, like the Bible does. The meaning of the Bible never changes, but the way that meaning affects your soul is dynamic and organic, always changing you and opening new windows of insight to God.

Additionally, the fact that it is living means it is also life-*giving*, like a seed (1 Pe.1:23). It not only gives new life to unbelievers at conversion, but it revives and renews the life of the believer as well (Ps.19:7-8).

He turned again toward the cottage. In time, a few of the colors reappeared. Something about them tugged at his spirit, drawing him despite his fear-almost as though it were a person, beckoning him.

1. **What are some methods God uses to draw people to himself?[[1]](#footnote-1) See Hosea 11:4 and Amos 4:6-11**.

Sometimes God uses tender love and kindness to draw us out of sin and toward himself (Hos.11:4). Other times he uses hunger, poverty, plagues, and other forms of suffering (Amos 4:6-11).

1. **What are some means God has used to draw *you* to himself?**

Be as transparent in your answer as you wish the others in the group to be. Whoever answers first will set the tone for how transparent the others will be. For this reason, it’s good for the leader to answer first on questions about the heart like this one.

In my case, God has often used crises to draw me to him. I run much harder after God when I am in desperation. He has also used Scripture to draw me-especially when I hear it powerfully preached.

1. **What is it in this world that tends to be most dazzling to you, competing with God’s glory for your attention?**

Something rustled behind him … A dark, churning cloud rolled toward him. The cloud resolved into a massive flock of birds … circling in a kaleidoscope of brilliant, dancing color. While the strange hues of the cottage had frightened Adam, these colors delighted him.

I tend to be lured from God by entertainment. Gratification is instant, and it requires no mental work.

#### Dig Deeper – Wisdom and Folly

Read Proverbs 9:1-6; 13-18 and watch for similarities in the way wisdom’s banquet and folly’s banquet are described.

What is the significance of the fact that both are described as a banquet and both offer identical invitations?

God and Satan are offering us essentially the same thing: satisfaction of the cravings of the soul. For example, the man who robs a bank and the man who spends time seeking God in the Scriptures may both be seeking to satisfy exactly the same appetite of the soul (the appetite for happiness).

So coming to God’s banquet does not means saying, “no” to our appetites or forgoing satisfaction.

1. **In the parable of the sower (see Matthew 13:1–9; 18–23)[[2]](#footnote-2) what is Satan’s first tactic when someone hears the Word, (illustrated as the hard ground)?**

If he trained his eyes on the cottage and kept a straight course, it shouldn’t take long to get there. … Whenever he stopped, the birds circled him, then resumed their progress as if drawing Adam along were a game. For Adam, it was a game. He waited for the birds to encircle him, watched them go again, and ran after them, laughing.   
 He turned back toward the cottage … A blinding flash and a crack of thunder made him jump. Pouring rain pelted him. Adam dashed for shelter under the trees.

To remove the truth of God’s Word from the heart before it has a chance to take root.

1. **What are some ways Satan might accomplish this?**

Through distraction: putting something else before me that captivates my attention before I’ve had a chance to digest the meaning of what I’ve heard.

Through attitudes: cultivating a negative attitude toward a principle in God’s Word that makes my heart unreceptive.

Through confusion: causing the presentation of the truth to be convoluted, or introduce conflicting ideas in my mind so that I don’t understand what is being said.

It's interesting--many of the ways this happens are related to the one communicating the truth. Someone who presents the Word of God in a confusing way may be unwittingly serving Satan's interests by making sure there is enough confusion in the hearers to prevent the Word from taking root.

This is also a good argument for making church services as distraction-free as possible, since Satan uses distraction to snatch the seed from people's hearts.

1. **What is the second tactic (shallow soil)?**

Using trouble and persecution to destroy the work of God’s Word in people’s hearts when their understanding hasn’t gone deep enough to become rooted.

1. **What are some specific examples of how this could happen in your heart?**

I could learn something from Scripture but fail to think deeply enough about it for it to become rooted in my soul. I am prone to this because as soon as I learn one thing, I’m always eager to move on to the next thing.

1. **What is the third tactic (thorny soil)?**

Choking the work of God’s Word out of someone’s life through the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desires for other things.

1. **What is the lie wealth tells your heart?**

That wealth, rather than God, is my security and source of happiness. So much so, that it’s worth cutting a few moral corners at times to get more of it.

1. Have you ever slacked off from seeking God, then when you sought him again found yourself much farther from him than you expected? Why does that happen? See Psalm 119:155.

He turned back toward the cottage, now a tiny dot in the distance. That’s impossible. I didn’t wander that far. He sighed. Now it’ll take forever to get there.

When we are not actively pursuing God, we drift from him. There is no standing still. As in a marriage, neglect results in relational distance.

Adam realized he was … ravenously hungry. The void of longing seemed to arise from deeper inside than his stomach.  
 *The cottage can wait,* he thought as he liberated the delicacy from the branch.

1. **What insights can you glean from Isaiah 55:1-2 about our appetite for God and our appetite for sin?**
2. The only requirement for eligibility is hunger and thirst. That means it’s attainable for everyone, and yet most people are excluded.
3. What God offers us is far more than external blessings. What he offers is to our souls like food and drink is to our bodies.
4. The priceless gifts we receive from God are free. There isn’t a person in the world who can’t afford the vast spiritual riches of heaven.
5. The “bread” of this world’s valuable things is not free.
6. It isn’t really bread (i.e. it does not satisfy the cravings of the soul).
7. Eating God’s food is closely connected to listening to him.
8. Eating God’s food brings delight.
9. **The** **flesh’s appetite for sin is literally insatiable. See Ephesians 4:19 (CSB “…with a desire for more and more”). Even after becoming disgusted with our sin, we return to it time and again even after a sin proves unsatisfying (See 2 Peter 2:22). Why is this? See Galatians 5:17**.

He bit into it. Pleasure coursed through him … He had the strange thought that he would fight to the death for this peach. And yet, he didn’t finish it. … He dropped the first in search of a bigger, juicier one. Every bite made him want two more. But even after stuffing himself, he didn’t feel full. In fact, he felt empty. Not hungry, but hollow and unsatisfied. -p.11  
 … He went to kick it into the bushes … But when he reached it, he paused. He picked it up and examined it again. He cleaned the dirt off … and devoured the rest of it.

Sin always lies to us. Even when it proves unfulfilling, it keeps promising that if we just had a little more, or a different form, we’d be happy. And the flesh, which always does the opposite of what the Holy Spirit wants (Gal.5:17), is eager to believe those lies.

Taken to its natural conclusion, we see this in a drunk who is in complete misery, but still drinking. Or a porn addict who is in the depths of despair, isn’t even enjoying what he’s looking at anymore, but still keeps going. Those are extreme cases, but they differ from the struggle we all have only in degree. Sin is like the potato chip or (name your junk food) that we keep eating even after they have given us a gut ache.

That’s why it’s so dangerous to begin indulging in the first place. As hard as sin is to resist, it’s a hundred times harder to stop.

1. Why does indulgence in sin so often result in irritability? For a case study, see 2 Samuel 13:1-2, 14-15.

He took another bite. Ugh! He threw it against a tree. It ricocheted and rolled to a stop in the dirt. Adam stared at the thing and hated it.

The sin promises satisfaction. When it fails to deliver, that causes aggravation. But in the insanity of our sinfulness, instead of that aggravation driving us to give up the sin, we take it out on the people around us.

Second, sin produces a guilty conscience. And a nagging conscience tends to make us irritable.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the presence of God is the source of our joy. Sin always distances us from his presence, resulting in diminished joy.

1. **Even after becoming disgusted with our sin, we return to it time and again (See 2 Peter 2:22). Why is this? See** **Galatians 5:17**; **Matthew 26:41.**

He went to kick it into the bushes … But when he reached it, he paused. He picked it up and examined it again. He cleaned the dirt off … and devoured the rest of it.

Even when we strongly desire to do what is right, the flesh (the part of us that is influenced by the world) wars against us and pushes us toward sin. If we have not remained spiritually alert and prayed earnestly, we will be too weak to resist this pressure.

1. The world is not content to merely sin. They want us to join them. When we don’t, they are suspicious. What insights can you gain from Psalm 1:1-2 and Romans 12:2 about how to avoid conforming to the world?

The man pulled an orange from his bag and held it out … as if offering a morsel to placate a dangerous animal.  
 Adam took a tentative step toward the man, then another, and accepted the gift. The man watched as he …slipped it into his mouth. … The man smiled, relaxed his posture, and extended his hand. “I’m George.”

Psalm 1-

1. Desire for God’s blessing, which only goes to those who reject the world’s way.
2. Refusal to listen to the world’s counsel. Worldly wisdom leads to an earthly mindset that results in a sinful lifestyle.
3. Delight in the law of the Lord above the world’s wisdom.

Romans 12 - Being transformed by the renewing of your mind.

1. In the story, the cottage draws Adam. Scripture speaks of God himself drawing us (John 6:44,65; 12:32). To see the close relationship between God and his Word, see John 1:1; Hebrews 1:3; and Psalm 138:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This parable is also found in Mark 4:1–20 and Luke 8:1–15. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)