

Finding Life in the Desert

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[0 : 0 0] All right. Let's get started with a question. And this is sort of an interesting question because as I was thinking about this, because I don't know if I've ever heard anyone really ask this or talk about this. Mental health is a major issue in our culture and rightly so.

You often see advertisements that talk about mental health and our need to have conversations about it, our need to sort through it. But a question that I really never see people ask is this, who is your model for mental health? You see people asking what is your model for mental health, but never who. There's never a who is your model for mental health. It's almost assumed that no, there's no one person who I should really look to to see what mental health looks like. Who is a person that you know that despite whatever life circumstances they're facing, you know, they could be thrown into the most awful situations or come from the most awful background or face the most awful future. No matter what physiological problems they face, the suffering in the body, suffering from imbalances in hormones in their brain, no matter what physiological problems they face, they somehow, they seem to respond in wise ways and right ways. They relate well to God and to other people. Who do you know who just flourishes under these pressures? I hope you've got at least one person in mind, a few people in mind.

And what I'm going to do is suggest there is one person in particular whom we should have in mind, a model for mental health. And this model may surprise you because the model, our first model for mental health is Jesus Christ. It's Jesus Christ. I believe that Jesus is the best, the model with a capital M for mental health, the best model that the world has ever seen. We often don't think about Jesus that way, do we? Frankly, I'll talk about this next week a little bit more. We don't even really think about Jesus as a person, to be honest, most of the time. But Jesus, he is both fully God, God. And then on the other hand, he is also the, not only is he fully human, he is the most fully human being who ever lived. Jesus is the full flower, the full expression of what it means to be a human being. He is more, you know, in a way, he's more human than you and I are.

Regardless of life circumstances, regardless of physiological suffering, Jesus, he just bursts out of the pages of scripture as absolutely stunning, absolutely radiant in all that he says and does.

Now the next two Sundays, I'm going to invite you to encounter this person of Jesus, to see him shining brightly, to know and understand him as we focus on Matthew chapter 11. That's the chapter of scripture that I read earlier in the service. That's where we'll be the next two weeks. And we're going to end this, I'm going to end this sermon, sermon there because I want us to end on the person of Christ. I honestly, I'm really looking forward to those sermons more than the one that I'm preaching right now. But, but in order to fully grasp, in order to fully appreciate what we're going to learn the next two weeks, we need to fully appreciate who Jesus is, how he responds to his difficult life circumstances. But in order to do that, we need first to understand how a human being in general works, how, how we find life in those circumstances. We need to understand the way that we, our hearts work. And to do that, one of the most helpful places in God's word is Jeremiah chapter 17. And we're going to be looking to this a whole bunch. You're definitely going to want to have that open with you throughout our time together this morning. Man, this was hard. What made this, these verses hard is, is because I just kept wanting to go to draw in all of the rest of the surrounding context. And finally, I just had to give up, you know, and just focus on, okay, these, these few verses, verses five through 10,

[4 : 26] Jeremiah 17, verses five through 10, that's on page 645. If you're using one of the blue Bibles, I just hand it out. Now let me read these verses for you.

Thus says the Lord, cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. He is like a shrub in the desert.

And shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord.

He is like a tree planted by water that sends out its roots by the stream and does not fear when heat comes. For its leaves remain green. And is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick. Who can understand it? I, the Lord, search the heart and test the mind to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds. This is the word of the Lord. Now, as we prepare to, uh, uh, sort of to open up these words to get a sense of what's really going on here, uh, I've got a little bit of a visual aid for you. Inside of your bulletin, there's a white insert that says sermon notes on it. And not only does it have a lot of lines for sermon notes, but there is a diagram that's printed out. This nice little diagram right here. And, uh, we'll have it, uh, up on the screen there.

And, uh, if, uh, you decide you want to go back, listen to this later when we put this on our website, I'll include a link as well to the diagram. Um, if you were, if you were part of the class formerly known as journey class, uh, and you were in it four years ago when I, when I, for, I think that was actually the very first time that I was helping to teach that class when I was here at the church. Uh, you might recognize this diagram from there. Uh, the diagram, I did not draw this. Uh, I wish I could take credit for it, but, but I didn't. It comes from the book, How People Change. The book, How People Change, uh, written by Tim Lane and Paul Tripp. And these guys developed this diagram based on the teaching, material of, of, of an author and counselor named David Powelson, whose David Powelson is one of the most prominent names in biblical counseling, uh, recently passed away, but just an amazing man of God. Now we have this diagram because while we're meditating, while, while, while he was meditating on these verses, Jeremiah chapter 17, verses five through 10, David Powelson noticed that here, the Lord paints a picture of all human beings. He paints a picture of people like you, people like me, people like your cousin Todd, people like Jesus of Nazareth, right? If you're human, if you're a human being, this, this is you. This is you right here. And these verses paint a portrait of finding life in the desert, finding life in the desert. Now, as we're going to look into that, I want to give you a heads up on, you know, where this sermon fits into, into these three weeks that we're going through this. Uh, this Sunday is going to be pretty heavy. This one's going to be pretty heavy. Uh, the, the next two weeks will be much more hopeful, much more encouraging. Um, but we're going to, it's gonna be pretty heavy this week because the desert is not an easy subject to dwell on. It's not an easy subject to talk about, but we need to go there first. We need to go there first. You'll notice that in these verses, if you look at verses five through 10, there are two trees, two kinds of plant, and that these represent two kinds of people.

[8 : 46] There are two paradigms for how human beings live. Now let's look at the first one, verses five and six. Let me throw this question out to you guys. So this is an interactive time. Okay. Uh, how would you, you know, looking at verses five and six, how would you describe the geography? How would you describe the geography of, of the place where that first tree is growing? How do you describe it?

Sorry, salt, sorry, salt, uh, salt land. Wasted salt land. What else? Dry. What else? Thirsty? Uninhabited. Not a great place to live.

Desolate. Parched place of the wilderness. Not the kind of place, uh, you want to live in, right? Not the kind of place you want to spend time in. Sounds pretty awful. Here's, here's the kind of location the prophet Jeremiah would have been thinking of when delivering this prophecy. I've got a, I have a photo up here on the screen. Um, actually, yeah, uh, Rick, can you take us back to the very first title slide? I, I messed, I messed that one up. Um, there we go. So this is, uh, just a photo of the, uh, from the rift valley in Israel. This would have been very near Judah where, uh, Jeremiah was writing this. This is a place called the Arabah to the Southeast of Jerusalem. It's near the salty dead sea. Uh, what do you think about this? This is the kind of place where you want to be growing if you're a tree.

Now it's not a great place, right? You don't see too many trees in this photo. There's, there's a little bit of vegetation, a little bit of shrubbery here and there, uh, but it's not a great place for your tree. Now that's where the first tree is growing. Now notice that when it comes to the second tree, look in verse eight, the Lord says in verse eight, that the second tree does not fear when heat comes. Now, is this first tree growing in a hot place?

Yes or no? Is the second tree growing in a hot place? Yes or no? Yeah. So both trees, are in this hot desert environment. Both trees are growing up under the beating heat of the sun.

[11 : 14] The heat, if we go back to the next slide, the heat in your diagram, that represents the situation both trees are planted in. There's that big burning sun at the top of your diagram, big bull letters labeled heat. And the question under this label is simply this. What is your situation?

What is your situation? The thing is you and I, we don't live life in a vacuum, do we? Right? It's sometimes easy to forget that. We see other people acting and doing stuff and we think, man, what's wrong with them? And we forget that they're living life in a situation that's tough.

They're facing hard things. We live in a complicated world that's full of heat coming at us from every side. I mean, think about it. There are so many options, so many opportunities around us every day.

You're constantly having to make decisions. Sometimes mundane little decisions that aren't really super meaningful. Sometimes they're just massive life-altering decisions. Life is hard. We face troubles. We face limitations. Our bodies falter. They suffer. They break down. We're surrounded by voices. We're surrounded by voices from all sorts of different sources, friends and family and people at church and somebody on the radio, something we read in the book or on the internet. They're filling our ears with contradictory demands, misleading advice, images that we see on the TV, images we see as we walk around, images that you see at school and you're trying to live up to that and conform to that.

We're being pressured into a certain way of behaving and thinking and desiring. We interact every day with people who are super different from us, right? I mean, if you're married, you know what I mean, right? We've got people who are super different from us, who don't think the same way, who don't always value the same things that we do. Many of these people sin against us, don't they? Sometimes they do horrible things to us. Sometimes it's actually, it turns out to be just a little miscommunication.

[13 : 34] There's just a misunderstanding that created a kind of an inconvenient or complicated situation. And then we not only see our own sufferings, we not only see our own shortcomings, but we see other people suffer. We're watching as we're seeing other people that we love, other people that we know suffering, other people we love and know falling short. We watch loved ones pass away.

And on top of all this, we have the devil to contend with. We have Satan. His craft and power are great and armed with cruel hate on earth is not his equal. We've got all of that to contend with. That's hard enough, man. When you hear all that, you're like, why can't life be easy? Don't you wish life were a lot easier than that? Don't you wish things, can't things just go well? Even when things are going well, that too can be a form of heat and temptation. If you doubt me, you can read in Proverbs 30, there's a wise man named Agur, and he actually asks of the Lord, give me neither poverty nor riches.

Feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, who is the Lord? That wealth, if things are going really great, there's a sort of a self-reliance that we can respond with, right? What is your situation? There's just no escaping it. There's no escaping the heat.

Here in the present, present tense, you and I are all facing the heat right now. If nothing else, you're listening to a preacher who sometimes is not always, who doesn't always explain things clearly, sometimes might say something that rubs you the wrong way, sometimes kind of a jerk, you know? If nothing else, you got that. We're all growing in the Arabah under the beating sun, right? Not only is the heat here in the present, like literally right here in the here and now as you're listening to this, not only is that going on, we've spent a lifetime underneath heat, haven't we? There is heat in your past.

Situations that you have gone through. And these situations have, they've had a massive influence on you. Let's not pretend that our past don't affect us, right? Things happen in your past, you responded to them. And that, a lot of that response, the past events and response have shaped you. We'll talk a little bit more about that next week, about the past and about the situation and its significance to us. I mean, some of you have got some really tough things. You've got parents who didn't love you as they should. You've got people who took advantage of you. You've got failures that haunt you to this day. So we've got heat in the present. We've got heat in the past. And sorry, folks, there's heat to come in your future too. Some of you actually, when I say that, you're like, oh, I know. You're already anticipating what's next in life. You know the days to come. You're like, man, I am actually, you don't even need to tell me that. I know I've got some difficult things coming down the pipe towards me right now. You got heat in the present, heat in the past, heat in the future, heat in all the circumstances around you. What is your situation?

[17 : 08] Under this heat, growing in this situation, there are two trees. If you look at your diagram, the first tree that we're going to talk about is on the right.

It's on the right side of the diagram. The Lord describes this tree in Jeremiah chapter 17, verses 5 and 6. Thus says the Lord, So in this desert, there's a growing shrub, right?

The most likely candidate I've seen for like, okay, what's this shrub exactly? It's a tree that's native to the Middle East. It's called a prickly juniper. You can see why looking at this photo, right? You've got these needles coming out. This is not the kind of tree you want to lean up against.

As a joke, you might throw your friend, toss your friend into the tree, right? Scrubby little tree, got these sharp needles. You know, it's a little bit stabby.

This is the first kind of tree that is growing up under the heat. It's a tree that produces thorns. Just the kind of tree that often grows in the desert, in the parched places.

[18 : 41] So what does this tree represent? What does this thorn tree represent? Verse 5 says it represents a man, a person, a human being like you and me.

And this is just sort of a paradigm of this kind of person. There's a little bit of this person in every one of us, right? Who, this person experiences a life and this life is characterized, actually, it says, cursed by the Lord. Why is he cursed? Why is the Lord's curse falling on him?

Well, because as a result of him trusting in man and making flesh his strength. That's what verse 5 says. He trusts in man and makes flesh his strength.

Now, if you're not familiar, if you, you know, if you aren't familiar with a lot of the Old and New Testaments, you don't read a lot of scripture and you see the word flesh thrown in there, you might think, well, that's kind of weird. You know, making flesh his strength.

The word flesh in the Bible, it's simply a way of describing human beings just trying to handle things on their own, trying to do life apart from the Lord. There's no vertical relationship with the Lord. They don't, they don't, there's no depends on the Lord at all. It's all about me and all the other people in my life. You know, they're living, people are living according to their own rules. They're living with their own strength. Maybe that's you, right? Maybe, maybe you take pride in your self-reliance. Maybe you take pride in your capacity to figure things out on your own.

[20 : 16] That's what, that's what I'm really tempted to do myself. Just figure things out on my own. Maybe you take pride in the power that you've got to achieve your dreams.

Maybe you take pride in the goodness that you see in yourself. I'm a good person. I'm a great guy. Or perhaps your source of strength, you know, you trust in man, but it's not yourself that you're trusting in. Maybe it's someone else. Maybe you think you just need to please certain people. If I could just get them to like me. Maybe you're trying to win their approval or love or respect. If I could just get them to love me. If I could just get them to respect me.

I could just get them to celebrate who I am. Maybe you're trying to convince them to see things your way. If I could just get them to see things my way. Man, that would finally solve all my problems.

Perhaps you're even looking, actually, maybe you're looking beyond the flesh, beyond man, and you're looking for strength in other spiritual beings and forces. I mean, and it was funny, like seeing the sea to sky, you know, seeing all the news about the gondola, you know, coming down and seeing all the little Facebook comments underneath, you know, may karma get this guy, right? I was like, oh, interesting. Well, you know, they're sending good vibes your way, right? So good vibes, karma, you know, all the crystals and stuff like that. But up in, up in verse two, the people of Judah, they're, they've got these spiritual beings they're turning to for help.

They're condemned in verse two for their worship of the Asherim, these gods that are going to, you know, help give them good crops to survive and make them flourish and just, just make their lives all around better. No matter what, your desires, you know, you know, no matter what, if, if, if your desires are not for the Lord God, they're in something or someone else. You're always trusting, you're always fearing, you're always in a way worshiping someone or something. Verse five concludes with an assessment of this thorny person. His heart turns away from the Lord. In the diagram, you see that this thorn tree grows out of that little heart with a minus sign.

[22 : 45] It grows out of a bad root, a bad root, a rotten and corrupted heart. Now this is drawn from verse nine. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. Who can understand it?

You know that the heart, the hidden core of who we are, the place of our desires and feelings and motives and thoughts and the heart, it's super deceitful, right? If you're familiar with Jacob from the book of Genesis, right? He's, he's this guy who's always tricking and deceiving people before the Lord kind of finally eventually gets ahold of his life, but he's always playing a game, always tricking and deceiving. And our hearts are kind of like that. Who can understand it? You can't figure it out, right? You're complicated. If you don't believe you're complicated, ask your friends. You know, we're, we're like Shrek the Ogre, right? You know, he says, Ogres are like onions. They have layers. We're also kind of like, you know, his donkey friend pointed out that, uh, uh, some of those layers kind of smell bad too, don't they? We're like that. You know, how, how often think about this, you know, maybe think about times in your life where you've sort of had layers of your heart unpeeled, where you did something and then you found, you thought you knew why you were doing it. And then you found out, you realized later, oh, it was actually for this reason. How often have you thought, oh, I did,

I did this for a bad reason, for a bad motive, I had bad desires. And then you uncover layers like, actually, no, nevermind. It was a good desire. It was, it was perfectly good. That doesn't happen very often, does it? It's usually the other way around. When the layers get pulled back, we're like, oh gosh, I, in the moment when I was lashing out at my spouse and it felt so good and so righteous, they were finally getting, they were finally hearing the truth. They were finally getting what they deserved. And then later you're like, oh, oh, boy, was I messed up.

Worse yet, the Lord says here that the heart is desperately sick. Actually, that's an understatement. The word is more literally incurable. Incurable. It's like going to the doctor and getting a diagnosis and he says, I'm sorry, there's nothing we can do for you. We can't fix the bad root.

There's a, I didn't, I don't, I don't have this on the overhead. I've, some of you have heard me say, you know, quote, you know, deliver this quote a number of times. It's from the theologian Ashley Null. And this is a, one of those very rarely outside of, outside of scripture, outside of a good catechism, do I encourage people to, to, and just urge people, you need to memorize this.

[25 : 50] But this is one of those extremely rare quotes that I think if you memorize this, it's going to help you out in your life a ton. And it's this, what the heart loves, the will chooses, and the mind justifies. What the heart loves, what your desires are deep down, deep down, you're very, you know, you're desiring people. That's the, that's you at your core. You have desires. You long for things. You love certain things. And a lot of times we don't even know what our desires are.

It's like that iceberg, the four-fifths of the iceberg under the surface. And we don't really, a lot of times, know what they are, but they're down there, they're in the layers, and we've got these desires, what the heart loves. Whatever the heart loves, the will chooses.

You do what you want to do all the time. Sometimes our desires are conflicting, but whatever your strongest, most overpowering desire is, eventually you'll find a way to do it. And in order to do it while feeling like, oh, I'm a good person, I can do this horrible thing, but I need to figure out a way that I can fulfill this bad desire and still feel good about myself. What the heart loves, the will chooses, then the mind justifies. So your mind is busy, busy, busy at work trying to figure out a way to justify your desires. That's why people are so irrational, right? We like to think, I like to think I'm a really rational guy. Oh, I just follow what's reasonable all the time.

No, our mind is a slave to our heart. Our mind is a slave to our heart. We do what we want to do because we want to do it. And then we come up with a reason why we had to do it. Oh, of course I had to do that. There was just no other way. Every other way was so unreasonable.

But the heart loves, the will chooses, and the mind justifies. There's this bad, deceitful, incurable root. And so it's sobering to then read the grave warning of verse 10.

[27 : 40] I, the Lord, search the heart and test the mind to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds. So we ended verse nine with, who can understand it?

The layers are so deep, so complex. And the Lord, the God, the judge immediately responds, I do it. He sees all of the incurable, rotten layers of the human heart. We're like heart surgeons who can't get down to the bottom, and we can't see all the rottenness, and we can't fix it.

But the Lord gets down under there. He sees all of it. The Lord knows the question raised by the bad root, what do you want and believe? He actually knows what all of us want, and he knows what all of us are believing and functioning out of. What, deep down, if you're being totally honest with yourself? Deep down, what are you desiring? What are you thinking? What are you believing?

Helpful hint, follow your feelings. Your feelings are a horrible guide to what's true, but they're a wonderful guide to what you desire and what you think is important. Follow those feelings down.

What's going on there? What's going on in your heart? What are you craving? Follow your actions. When do you do stuff that's honestly kind of, you realize that was kind of irrational. That didn't really make a lot of sense. When do you do stuff that other people point, godly, wise people point out as, that's kind of crazy? You know, when do you do stuff like that? Follow those actions down.

[29 : 27] What's going on. What's going on inside of you? But really, it's the Lord who sees through it all. This bad root produces a kind of fruit. It produces thorns. Your diagram labels this as bad fruit, and if any of you have eaten a thorn, you know that's true. It's bad fruit.

Now, why does the diagram label it as bad fruit specifically? It's because that's actually the language Jesus uses to describe it. Believe it or not, this is not the only time in the Bible that this model that you see here is presented this way. Jesus actually has his own two trees picture in Luke chapter 6. Here's how Jesus describes it. No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. Not that hard to figure out. The good person, out of the good treasure of his heart, produces good. And the evil person, out of his evil treasure, produces evil. For out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks. Out of the abundance of the heart, out of that bad root, the mouth speaks bad words, bad fruit. Think about it this way. If I took a sponge, and I had a little bowl here, and I filled it with orange juice, and I dipped the sponge in orange juice, and I squeezed it out, what would come out of the sponge? What would happen? What happened if

I squeezed it? Orange juice comes out, right? Now let's say I've got a bowl of grape juice, and I stick the sponge in grape juice, and then I lift it up, and I squeeze it. What happens? Why not orange juice? Why not? I mean, that's what happened last time. Sorry, what? I didn't dip it in orange juice.

I didn't dip it in, okay, so. Come on, guys. Sorry, what? Grape juice can't breathe. Right, yeah. Why is it that when I squeeze a sponge, now grape juice is coming out of this? It's the same sponge.

It only has grape juice in it. Oh. It's almost like when pressure gets to you, what's inside of you will come out of you. When the heat, when the pressure gets to you, what's inside of you is going to come out of you, right? That's what Jesus is saying. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

[32 : 13] You know, words come out. Oh, whoops. Please come back words, you know. But, but we say, oh, I didn't mean that. I didn't mean that. Hmm. You mean you wish you hadn't meant that, right? Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. How do you react to the heat?

What are the things you do and the things you say? There are many examples in scripture of this. One example is found in Galatians chapter five. This is written about the man who makes flesh his strength.

And in Galatians chapter five, it's written, now the works of the flesh are evident. Here's what happens when you get squeezed. Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. Just a partial list. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. As Jesus puts it elsewhere, I believe it's in Mark chapter seven where he says, you know, out of the heart of man, these things come and that's what defiles a person, right? The bad root produces bad fruit and bad root and bad fruit don't belong in the kingdom of God. These are just a sampling of the bad fruit that's produced by that bad root, by a person whose heart turns away from the Lord. These are just a few of the thorns with which we kind of stab one another.

These are the thorns that pierce the head of the Savior who suffered for us. This bad fruit has got lingering effects. You know, in this diagram you see over there's this arrow, consequences. We reap a harvest from it. We need to ask ourselves, what are the consequences of this bad fruit? Down in Jeremiah chapter 17, down in verse 11, we read just, here's just one example.

Like the partridge that gathers a brood that she did not hatch, she's, you know, gone and grabbed some eggs that aren't hers. So is he who gets riches, but not by justice. In the midst of his days, they will leave him, and at his end, he will be a fool. And then in verse 13, we encounter even more consequences.

[34 : 52] Oh Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you shall be put to shame. Shame. What makes this really, really tough is that a lot of time, these consequences from this arrow, guess what happens? That becomes more heat. And then we produce more thorns, we eat more consequences, more heat, more thorns, more consequences. That's how addictions work a lot of times.

A lot of times, you know, when I see people, you know, who've suffered some genuine, genuine tough things in their life, just awful things, and it's just agonizing to watch, because then they respond, they've, out of a bad, out of a bad root, they isolate themselves from other people, they stop showing up at church, they stop listening to God's word, they say things to other people, and they produce this bad fruit, and as a result, they just make the situation even worse. The heat gets worse. And this whole time, they're convinced, the real problem in my life is the heat. The real problem in my life is the way other people are treating me. You know what, that is the heat, and I want to be clear, guys, the heat is a real problem. Some of you guys are going through such hard things right now, and that needs to be known and understood. The deepest problem in your life is not the heat, it's the thorns, it's the bad root that produces consequences.

Now, all of this is sobering truth, isn't it? It's tough, it makes sense, but it's hard to hear.

Aren't you glad that's only half of the diagram? You know, that's only half of the story, right? We're going to move on to the good stuff, but before we do that, let's pause, do a little bit of an interactive activity here. I'm going to paint a situation that some of us find ourselves here. I wrote at the beginning, it's not a particularly wild one, then I guess I got a little, my imagination ran a little bit wild, so it did kind of turn crazy. But let's do a heat and thorns playing out in your life, okay? So, all right, close your eyes. We're going to visualize a scenario here, and things are going to go off the rails pretty fast.

You and your spouse are in your car. You're driving your kids down to Horseshoe Bay. You're going to catch a ferry to the island. You're going to go camping with family at the lake.

[37 : 35] You've been looking forward to this for weeks, months even. You're excited. You know, you do, you made sure you, you dot all your I's, cross your T's, you paid for a ferry reservation so you wouldn't miss the ferry. You leave with plenty of time.

And you know, it's honestly kind of a scorching, hot, sunny day out, but you've got the AC on. Everyone's in a good mood until you run to a solid wall of traffic after you pass Britannia Beach.

There's a car accident up ahead. Traffic is backed up for two kilometers. So you're sitting there. You're stuck. And guess what's going on in the car?

The kids are getting increasingly agitated. Obviously, your children are wonderful, well-behaved angels, and they're completely out of character. They're starting to poke each other. They're starting to hit each other.

They're starting to kind of yell at each other. Time is ticking away. You're just sort of inching slowly forward. And you're looking at your clock. You're looking at the ETA on your GPS.

[38 : 42] And you realize, hmm, we might be missing the ferry. Then you notice the vents are no longer blowing cool air.

You turn the AC up higher. It doesn't make a difference. The air coming out is starting to get really hot. You know what that means. Massive repair bill, right?

Air conditioning is never cheap to repair. In the meantime, you're stuck in this awful, sweltering car with misbehaving children. So you're like, okay, we've got to get this heat situation under control.

Well, you roll down the windows, and that's when you realize the car right in front of you is playing really loud music. And very quickly, you realize it's got very explicit sexual language. Your kids hear it. Immediately, they decide they're going to start trying out these new words they've just learned.

You yell at the kids. Your spouse suddenly snaps at you. Why do you always yell at them? You're just like your mother. Your shirt is soaked through with sweat.

[39 : 50] You didn't pack lunch. I mean, it was supposed to be just a quick trip to the ferry terminal, and you were going to eat there. So now everyone's hungry. Now everyone's whining. And all of a sudden, one of your kids lets out a shriek because the other just peed themselves.

All right. There's the heat. Okay. So I've told my part of this tale of woe. This is sort of a choose-your-own-adventure story. This is where you guys come in. Let's talk about the thorns. What's some of the bad fruit?

Put yourself in that choose and say, okay, let's be realistic how it might respond. What's some of the bad fruit that you might produce in response to that? How might you be tempted to react? Your turn. Yell?

Somebody said yell. Obviously, that worked the first time, so let's just keep doing that. You get angry? What else?

Put the kids up for adoption. Put the kids up. Pull out your phone. Start looking up adoption agencies. Yeah. Yeah. Yep.

[40 : 55] What else? Sorry? Missed that? Make the wife walk. Guess who's going to be walking for the rest of the week, Steve?

What else? What else might you do? Take out all your frustration on the kids. Take out all your frustration on the kids. Right? What else?

Turn the car around. Oh, turn the car around. Right? Yeah. If you could. I guess you're kind of stuck, but, you know, maybe. Maybe you could threaten the kids. Right? Cancel the trip. And just help everyone just after this.

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Cancel it. Like, kids, you know, forget it. We're not going at all. And I'll, yeah, that'll go, that'll go over great. Right? How else? Maybe hop out of the car and go have a talk with the car in front of you.

Yeah. You know, do you know what, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. You know, give them the riot act. Right? Join them instead. Join them instead.

[42 : 04] Yes. That's right. As bad as things are in that car, honestly, it seems like they're having fun at least. You know? Exactly. Right? I don't know. Maybe start just, you know, just banging on your steering wheel or, you know, who knows.

Right? Man. You can sell them to a car that does have AC. Yeah. Yeah. Send your kids off to a good car that's got AC. Right? Well. There's just a lot of stuff.

Right? This is sort of the stuff that the family tells stories about for years later. What are some of the desires? So let's talk about the bad root behind all those things.

What are some of the desires and beliefs you might have that would produce bad fruit like that? Wanting to be in control. I deserve.

This isn't fair. I deserved this. I've been waiting for this for weeks. What's that? Do you know who I am? Do you know who I am, Lord? What else?

[43 : 04] We prayed before the trip started. So this is going well. Oh. We prayed. Lord, we prayed before this trip started. How come you didn't make everything perfect?

My way. Yeah. Oh, yeah. For sure. And we could just go on and on with bad fruit, bad root. What are some of the consequences that we might reap? Out of if we do, we produce that bad fruit.

What are some of the consequences we might reap? Sorry? A really rotten holiday. A really rotten holiday. Yeah. You might say things that you don't want, that you feel you didn't mean.

Or things out of being angry with your children and yourself. Yes. They'll be mad at you. They'll be mad at you. Lingering resentment. Lingering resentment, right?

Divorce. Wow, Carl. Yeah. Divorce. Yeah. Let's go to the nuclear option here, right? You know? Okay.

[44 : 04] You know, it's funny because, like, okay, you know, that's maybe an extreme scenario. But we can all relate to that, right? I mean, who hasn't faced tough stuff like that? And I didn't even get, like, that was just sort of almost like a fun example.

But some of the examples in our lives of the heat are just, they just make you weep. Like, some of you have told me your stories, and it just makes you want to weep. It's the kind of stuff we wouldn't be laughing about.

Especially stuff from our past, right? It's pretty relatable and also pretty messed up. The heat's messed up. The thorns are messed up. And Jeremiah 17 verse 9 is right.

Our hearts are treacherous. Our hearts are incurable. But you know what? What is impossible with man, what's incurable with man, is possible with God.

Right? We, our hearts might be incurable, but we have a great physician, Jesus Christ, our Lord. We've got a great physician. We have a redeemer.

[45 : 06] And that's where the third part of the diagram comes in, this cross down here at the bottom. We ask, who is God? What does he say and do in Christ?

Who is God? What does he say and do in Christ? You know, we want to remember. Such an important word in scripture. Remember. Remember who our God is.

He is the Lord. He is the God who is great, the God who is good, the God who is with us. A few verses up in chapter 16 verse 21. The Lord says, I will make them know my power and my might, and they shall know that my name is the Lord.

My name is Yahweh. Remember who he is. In his word to us in the Bible, we see not only who the Lord is, who God is, but we see what he has done for us.

We see that this is the God who sent his son, Jesus Christ, to atone for our sins. To die so that we would be forgiven as he dies in our place and pays the penalty we deserve.

[46 : 16] Who came to rise again from the dead so that he would rise, so that we too would rise to new life. Not just a future resurrection, but in the here and now we get a taste of that life that's to come.

Eternal life, the good life. He sends his Holy Spirit in the here and now to bring us life, to renew us. The work of the Holy Spirit you see in this diagram, it flows out from the cross.

This is what makes the difference. What turns the desert, you know, what seems like a desert, if you've got the work of the Spirit flowing like water under the surface.

That makes all the difference in the world. In chapter 17, verse 13, our God is called the hope of Israel, the fountain of living water.

And so because of the cross of Christ, we can find life in the desert. You can be the second tree. You can be the fruit tree that we read about in verses 7 and 8.

[47 : 25] Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water that sends out its roots by the stream.

And does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green. And is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit. Now the most likely tree Jeremiah would have had in mind, and this is the tree Jesus specifically mentions, it's, you know, the good old ficus, the common fig, right?

So you've got this big, beautiful tree with green leaves and some amazing, delicious fruit. In this heat, it says there's heat coming.

In fact, there's drought even. But this tree is not passively shriveling away. Notice the tree is active. If you're a botanist, you're like, yep, trees are active, man.

They're totally reacting to their environment. This tree, it says, it sends out its roots by the stream. So it's not just sitting there going, woe is me, I'm the victim. It's just like, I'm going to send out my roots.

[48 : 34] I'm going to send it. I need water. I need that fountain of living water. I'm going to send my roots into that water that I know is there. It might be under the ground. Other people might not see it.

The stream bed might look like it's running dry, but I know that there's water running underneath it. I'm going to send my roots into that. It finds the water. It drinks from the Spirit's work as he points us to the cross.

So from this stream, a good root forms. A good root forms a good heart. How are you seeking God in repentance and faith?

How are you seeking God in repentance, turning from your sins and turning to him in faith? We open his word. We remind ourselves who he is again and again and again, because we forget.

We meet weekly. We need this, guys. We need this weekly meeting. This isn't a chore. We need to remember and to remember together, not just as an individual.

[49 : 37] We need to remember together and remind one another, singing and addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

We need to hear other people singing around us and telling us the truth. We need to hear God's word. We need to hear others praying. We need to remind one another what it means that he has given us his family name.

We remember and believe in Jesus Christ. We trust that Jesus alone can save us from our sin, that he alone can help us in our weakness. And so we come to him with humility, with just this humble attitude of need.

That's what Jeremiah does in chapter 16, verse 19. He begins his prayer saying, Oh Lord, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge in the day of trouble.

The Holy Spirit renews us as we listen to God's word, as we speak to him in prayer, as we do it individually, as we do it together. He reaffirms, he reminds us of our new covenant relationship with God, as we take communion together.

[50 : 49] We begin desiring good things and thinking and believing right things. And then out of this good root, begins to grow good fruit.

And that sunlight that before was, you know, the occasion for producing all the thorns, now that sunlight is taken in, and now you produce fruit from it.

How are you responding with love? How are you responding with love? That's the good fruit. Your words and actions begin to change. At first, honestly, at first you're probably kind of like black, you know, the blackberry plants.

You're producing both fruit and thorns, right? But as you grow to know the Lord, you start to become more like a fig tree, just fruit. You start feeling compassion, tempered by wisdom towards others.

You start bearing fruit. In Galatians chapter five, after that list of works of the flesh, Paul gives what he calls the fruit of the spirit. He says, the fruit of the spirit, the fruit of this water flowing, is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

[52 : 07] Against such things, there is no law. And from these things, you know what? We then reap good things. We then reap good things.

Notice there are consequences to this too. What are the good consequences when you respond to the Lord with obedience and love? When we reap bad fruit, honestly, I see people, I've seen people over the last few years who when they suffer, they suffer so much more than they need to.

They suffer so much more than they ever needed to because of the consequences of the thorns. But I've also seen people who are suffering and suffering well. And honestly, their sorrow is mingled with joy.

And in the consequences of the fruit they bear, they find joy and they find life, even in the middle of sorrow, even in the middle of heat. And other people are blessed and encouraged.

It's amazing. Like when I'm counseling people, it's just so remarkable sometimes. It's so encouraging to see, you know, for someone who's been under the heat, they've been producing thorns, their lives are all messed up, they come for help.

[53 : 24] Okay, let's sort this through. Okay, let's begin with just like this one little, let's start with this one little act of obedience and trust in the Lord. And then they do it. And the Lord blesses it like a hundred times more than you'd expect.

Brings just amazing things from just a tiny little act of obedience. Produce one tiny fig and it feeds a multitude. That could be you.

I've really rushed through the last two parts of this diagram, through the cross, through the fruit. And that's not because, you know, we're like, okay, here at Squamish Baptist Church, we're just a bunch of dour, gloomy people. We wallow in suffering and sin. You know, that's, you know, that's not, that's not it, right?

It's because we're going to spend the next two weeks on the cross and on the fruit. We're going to spend two thirds of our time on that, on the good stuff. We're going to do this by looking at our real flesh and blood model of mental health.

We're going to watch and learn from Jesus of Nazareth. He's going to be responding to a difficult situation he faces in Matthew chapter 11. And I read about that heat, that situation in Matthew chapter 11.

[54 : 30] Jesus faced a ton of heat in his life. If you doubt it, go, if you, if you doubt it, and if you're wondering whether Jesus was really affected by difficult stuff, go, go read about, go read his, the account of the Garden of Gethsemane and the mental state he was in then.

In Matthew chapter 11, verses two and three, Jesus is questioned by his cousin, John the Baptist. And John the Baptist is in prison by Herod. And he's wondering if things aren't looking so great.

And he's discouraged. He's wondering, you know, I thought Jesus was this Messiah. How come this is happening? And he questions Jesus. Then in verses 16 and 19, Jesus brings up the fact that so many of his countrymen, they are not merely, you know, they don't merely have questions like John the Baptist does.

They're playing games with Jesus. They don't believe he's God's Messiah. They're digging up reasons to criticize anything he does. They're going to find a reason to find something wrong with Jesus.

So on the one side, Jesus, his most ardent supporter, the guy who's heralding his ministry, is now questioning him. On the other side, his critics are tearing him apart. He can't do anything right. So how does Jesus respond to the heat?

[55 : 46] Does Jesus produce thorns? Or does he produce fruit? Here's what Jesus could have said if Jesus were a thorny person.

Here's what Jesus could have said to God. How could you do this to me, God? I thought you were in control of everything. But all the wise people who seem to have it all figured out, they're rejecting me.

The only people who are listening to me are no better than children. This isn't fair. What do you want out of me?

I don't think you really care about me at all, God. And honestly, I don't think I know who you are anymore. If this is how you treat me, then why am I wasting my time telling other people who you are?

He could have said that. And then Jesus could have turned and spoken to the people around him. You need to leave me alone now. You're weak.

[56 : 49] You're needy. You're demanding people. You're just going to suck the life out of me. You'll just have to handle things on your own. Sorry. I can't help you. I can't teach you anymore.

You're just holding me back. Find some other teacher to get help. Suck it up. Life ain't easy. Those are some thorny words, right? Aren't you glad that that's not our Jesus?

Amen. The real Jesus knows how to find life in the desert. The real Jesus is our model of mental health. And more than that, our Savior and our Lord.

Here are the fruitful words that Jesus really said to God, his Father. I thank you, Father. I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. And no one knows the Son except the Father.

[58 : 03] And no one knows the Father except the Son. And anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. And then Jesus turned and he spoke these fruitful words to you and to me.

Come to me.

God, our Father. What a beautiful Savior. How good he is.

We long to be like him. Give us clean hands and a pure heart. Teach us to find rest in him.

Lord, we have... How long have we vainly sought? Yeah. I feel we like him. What? seals... I think... Let's.....