

Gary Ricucci  
**SESSION 3 - Thorns:**  
**What Heat Reveals**

**AIM:**

To help you reflect on the ways in which the desires of your heart drive your responses to the heat of life.

All Christians, although saints, still suffer and still sin. In the world we have tribulation and disappointment. God uses these trials (**heat**) to reveal the remaining sin in our hearts, in order to lead us to the liberating power of the gospel. As God's children we are being transformed by the Spirit who is at work in us.

**Colossians 3: 5-9**

Wrong thoughts, beliefs, and desires in our own hearts produce thorns (rather than good fruit) in response to the heat (trials and tribulations) of daily life.

**Colossians 3: 12-17**

Thoughts, beliefs, and desires, informed and empowered by God's Word, the gospel, and grace produce good fruit (rather than thorns).

There are at least seven ungodly ways we can respond to life's heat. These responses (these thorns) expose and reveal the thoughts, beliefs, and desires that need to be renewed by the gospel and the truth of God's Word.

1. Worry – you fret, preoccupied with the heat
2. Escapism – you try to anesthetize yourself
3. Denial – you try to ignore the problem
4. Anger and blame – you lash out at those (including God) that you believe are responsible for the heat and for your response
5. Self-pity – you feel sorry for yourself
6. Fear - you shrink back in dread of the worst-case scenarios
7. Despair – you don't believe God is with you, or is able, leaving you hopeless

## DISCUSS

With your discussion partner, share the one or two most tempting experiences of heat from this past week (this could be the ongoing issue from previous homework). Did you respond in any of the seven ways listed above? Which one(s)? What did your response look like? sound like? feel like? In what ways did your response create new heat for you and others?

## MY THORNS COME FROM MY HEART

### Mark 7:20-23

*21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil...*

### Luke 6:43-45

*45 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.*

### James 4: 1-3

*1 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*

“Our hearts don’t reveal themselves all at once. We might begin by expressing a preference that seems entirely reasonable. But if that preference is tied to something deep within, we won’t let it go, and it grows into something we desire even more strongly. When desire grows into something we believe we really need, we feel entitled to it and become resentful of whoever keeps it from us (a spouse, a stranger driving the car in front of us, or God). Instead of having a preference for something, we end up demanding that it be supplied immediately. This doesn’t mean what we might want is a bad thing in and of itself. Often it can be a good thing, such as respect, love, peace, and quiet. But once a preference becomes a desire we “need” and feel entitled to, we demand that we receive it. Then the fighting begins with those see only their own ‘need’.”

Here’s what the process looks like:

PREFERENCE > DESIRE > NEED > ENTITLEMENT > DEMAND

(*Real Change* p.24)

Another way to look at it:

DESIRE > DISAPPOINTMENT > DESERVE > DEPEND > DEMAND > DEIFY

We have looked at how our desires become demands and “needs.” That is one way the Scriptures describe how our hearts go astray (Galatians 5:16-17; Ephesians 2:3). God has many other ways of describing what is going on inside us when we sin on the outside.

Here are some questions to help you get at what’s going on in your heart. They all start the same way: ***When I sin...***

1. What am I loving?
2. What am I seeking, aiming for pursuing?
3. Where am I putting my hope?
4. What am I fearing? What do I not want? What am I worrying about?
5. Where am I looking for safety, refuge, and comfort?
6. What or whom am I trusting in that is not the Lord?
7. Whose performance or control is making life work for me?
8. Whose opinion of me counts most? From whom do I desire approval and fear rejection?
9. What is making me feel rich, secure, and prosperous?
10. Whose victory or success am I hoping will make my life happy?
11. What am I thinking are my rights? What am I feeling entitled to?
12. What am I praying for?
13. What am I thinking about most? What preoccupies me? What am I obsessed with? In the morning, where does my my mind instinctively drift?
14. What am I talking about? What is important to me? What attitudes am I communicating?
15. How am I spending my time?
16. What are my priorities?
17. What are my characteristic fantasies, either pleasurable or fearful? Daydreams? What do my night dreams revolve around?
18. What are my idols and false gods? I what do I place my trust or set my hopes? What do I turn to or seek? Where do I take refuge?
19. How do I implicitly say, “If only...” (to get what I want, avoid what I don’t want, keep what I have)?
20. Where do I find my identity? How do I define who I am?

## **DISCUSS**

With your discussion partner, once again briefly share those same one or two tempting experiences of heat from this past week (this could be the ongoing issue from previous homework). Using this sequence, talk through the process of how your desire and preference were actually exposed as an idol.

DESIRE > DISAPPOINTMENT > DESERVE > DEPEND > DEMAND > DEIFY

**These questions can help you recognize the thorns that reveal and expose the roots that God is after.**

What thoughts did you have? What words did you use? What tone characterized any communication? How did you interact with those involved? What behavior did you display? How did your thoughts, beliefs, and desires affect your performance in your relationships and responsibilities?

## **HOMEWORK**

1. Spend some time looking at the story of the lost son in Luke 15:11-32. What can you see of his heart issues? Meditate on how the father responds to the repentant son. How does God respond to all those who come back to him convinced of their attitude problems? Keep talking to God about what you are finding.
2. Next sum up – in writing – what you are discovering about the specific issue you are working on. Briefly, describe the heat you are facing, the thorns you are displaying, and the desires hiding in your heart, as well as a summary of the ways in which God responds to you when you come to him in repentance. Writing this out will help to clarify your thoughts and engage you more fully with the process. You might consider emailing this to your leader as an opportunity for feedback.
3. If you have time, explore other places where the Bible describes how God receives those who mess up and turn back in repentance and faith. You might try Isaiah 54:4-8; Micah 7:18-20; and Luke 19:1-10.