

KEEP YOUR FOCUS

- A. Introduction: God has chosen to reveal Himself to us — His character, His will, His plans and purposes — through His written Word, the Bible. It is our only completely accurate source of information about God.
1. Not only does God reveal Himself to us through His Word, He also works in our lives through His Word. When we believe what He says, He brings it to pass in our lives. Jer 1:12
 - a. That's how we're initially saved. God's Word is proclaimed to us. We believe it, and the Spirit of God, through the Word of God, imparts eternal life to us. I Pet 1:23; John 3:3,5
 - b. In the parable of the Sower sowing the Word of God, Jesus explained that that is how His kingdom would advance in the period between His first and second coming. Mark 4:14-20
 1. Jesus revealed that there will be challenges to the Word of God that can make it unfruitful in our lives if we don't know how to deal with them: the devil; persecution, affliction, and tribulation; the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and lust for other things v15-19
 2. These various challenges can make it look and feel as though what God says is not so and thereby affect our faith, trust, and confidence in Him. These challenges can influence us to behave in ways that are contrary to God's Word.
 - c. We must learn how to deal with these challenges so that we can remain steadfast and unmovable in the face of everything that tries to move us away from God and His Word. I Cor 15:58
 2. For the last few weeks we've been discussing the role that our mind plays in becoming unmovable.
 - a. Paul, who himself was unmoved by life's challenges (Acts 20:22-24), wrote to encourage Christians who were in danger of being moved from their commitment to the Lord. Heb 12:1-3
 1. Paul told them to run the race set before them looking unto Jesus, considering Him so that they would not grow weary in their minds (contemplate, think carefully and for a long time).
 2. The number one way we look at, focus on, and consider Jesus is through the Bible. The Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, is revealed through the written Word.
 - b. If you're going to be unmoved by life's challenges, you must become a regular, systematic reader of the Bible, particularly the New Testament. Regular means daily (or close to it). Systematic means reading from start to finish, over and over, until you get familiar with it. Understanding comes with familiarity.
 1. The Bible is a supernatural book that will work in you and change you. The Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Christ) works in us through the Word of God. II Cor 3:18; II Thess 2:13
 2. Regular, systematic reading will change your view of reality or your perspective, which in turn changes how you deal with life. It will renew your mind. Rom 12:2
 - A. Before we were saved, our minds only had access to the information that our physical senses gave us. But there's more to reality than what we see and feel.
 - B. God's Word has been given to us, in part, to show us the way things really are according to Him. A renewed mind sees reality as it truly is and acts accordingly. What you believe and how you act is based on how you think or your perception of reality.
 3. In this lesson we want to discuss what it looks like in real life to focus on and consider Jesus.
- B. Many of us go to the Bible to find the verse that will fix our situation. I'm not saying that never happens, but the Bible is intended to fix us by changing our perspective as it conforming us to the image of Christ or makes us like Jesus in character and power, holiness and love.
1. Consider this thought in connection with becoming unmovable in the face of life's challenges.
 - a. I Peter--Peter wrote to Christians living in Asia Minor who were experiencing increasing pressure and hostility from unbelievers. Severe persecution and death lay in the not too distant future. His purpose in writing was to encourage them to stay faithful no matter what happens.
 - b. This epistle is sometimes called the suffering epistle because its main theme is how Christians should deal with challenges that bring suffering into our lives.

1. The word suffering is used sixteen times in this letter. Six of them refer to Christ's sufferings because He is our example of how to deal with life's hardships. I Pet 2:21
 2. This is a lesson for another day. But if you read Peter's epistle, you'll note that he says nothing about how you change your circumstance and stop your troubles. We can't stop many of life's challenges (particularly those caused by the freewill choices of other people).
 - A. Troubles are part of life in a fallen world. Jesus Himself said that we will have: tribulation and trials and distress and frustration (John 16:33, Amp).
 - B. But He also said that we can learn to overcome in them by His power: Be of good cheer — take courage, be confident, certain, undaunted — for I have overcome the world. I have deprived it of power to harm, have conquered it [for you] (John 16:33, Amp).
 2. I Pet 1:13--Instead, Peter, like Paul, exhorted his readers to gird up or deal with their minds.
 - a. Gird up the loins was a familiar expression to them. Long garments (or robes) were the common attire of the day. Girding referred to the practice of tucking their clothing up under their belt when traveling, working, or serving.
 1. It has the idea of being ready for action, diligent, and determined. John 13:4,5; Luke 12:35,37 Luke 12:35--Be dressed for service and well prepared (NLT); Luke 12:35--Keep your loins girded and your lamps burning (Amp).
 2. Be sober literally means to abstain from much wine. However, the word is used figuratively to mean watchfulness. Be watchful. I Thess 5:6,8; I Pet 1:13; 4:7; 5:8
 3. Hope means to expect with desire to the end. The Greek word translated end means completely or perfectly. Hope to the end for the grace that will be revealed when Jesus returns.
 - b. The idea in I Pet 1:13 is to be mentally alert to the fact that the Lord is coming: So brace up your minds; be sober — circumspect [morally alert]; set your hope wholly and unchangeably on the grace (divine favor) that is coming to you when Jesus Christ is revealed (Amp); think clearly and exercise self control (NLT); concentrate your minds with the strictest self-control (20th Cent); prepare your minds for action, and with perfect calmness, fix your hopes (Goodspeed).
 3. Notice that I Pet 1:13 begins with the word: wherefore or therefore. Peter made his statement about girding up our minds in the context of what he had just written. In other words, fix your minds on your hope in light of what I have just said. v1-12
 - a. We could do entire lessons on each point, but let's briefly summarize what Peter wrote to them. Peter greeted them and then reminded them of the hope to which we've been called. v3-5; 10-12
 1. We've been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus. We have an inheritance reserved for us in Heaven that will be revealed at the coming of Jesus.
 2. It is the salvation that God has been promising since the beginning (since the fall of man in the Garden, a salvation that will undo the damage done by sin). God will keep us by His power through our faith until the plan is complete.
 3. Your faith is being put to the test by the trials you are experiencing, but don't be moved by any of it. It's worth it to stay faithful to Christ. v6-8
 - b. Then Peter writes: Prepare your minds to deal with these hardships. Brace them by staying aware of the fact that there's an end in sight. Jesus will come and make this world right. This hope will enable you to stand whatever comes your way.
 1. We could do an entire series on the first twelve verses in this epistle. But the point for now is this: He doesn't give them a solution to bring the immediate crisis to an end.
 2. Peter directs them to keep their focus, their attention on Jesus and what He has done, is doing, and will do. In other words, Peter reminds them of the perspective they need to face the hardships they are encountering. It's not what you see, it's how you see what you see.
- C. Back to our original question. What does this look like in real life? When we say "focus on Jesus", what does that mean? How do we do it?

1. Let's first state what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that we must live with a mental picture of Jesus constantly in our head. Nor does it mean that every thought has to be about God or have God in it.
 - a. Col 3:2--Paul wrote that Christians are to set our affection (the Greek word is "mind") on things above. That's another way of saying: Focus your attention of Jesus.
 - b. When we read Paul's writings in the New Testament, it's clear what that meant to him. Remember he was personally taught the message that he preached by Jesus Himself. Gal 1:11,12
 1. To put your mind on things above means that you live with the awareness that there's more to your situation than what you see, more to life than this present moment, and more to your life than just this lifetime. You know that nothing can come against you that's bigger than God.
 2. Col 3:2--Set your minds and keep them set on what is above — the higher things (Amp); Give your minds to things that are above (Weymouth); practice occupying your minds with (Williams); Let your thoughts dwell on that higher realm (NEB).
 - c. Sometimes people hear lessons like this and misinterpret it to mean that every thought in their mind has to be about God. But that's not reasonable.
 1. Consider this example. When you are married, your spouse is not in every thought you have. But the fact that you are married is an ever-present reality that affects how you think and act.
 2. We live in this world and many things draw our attention. And, that's not necessarily wrong. It has to do with your perspective, your view of reality, as you live this life.
 3. Do you live with the consciousness that there's more to life than just this life and that eternal things (those that will outlast this life) are most important? (lessons for another day)
2. To focus on Jesus means to focus on the Word of God. It means consider what you see in terms of what God says and recognize that there is more to reality than what you see and feel in the moment.
 - a. Notice that effort is involved. You must set your mind or choose to focus your attention on things you can't see and then keep it there. Why does this take effort?
 1. We don't automatically have that perspective. It has to develop in us. Before we were Christians we had no access to the unseen God and the kingdom to which we now belong (John 3:3,5). This is one reason our minds must be renewed by the Word of God (Rom 12:2).
A renewed mind sees reality as it truly is according to God.
 2. There are constant distractions that will draw our attention elsewhere: circumstances, emotions, unrenewed thinking patterns, influences of the devil, the chores of daily life, etc.
 - b. Matt 6:25-34--Jesus told His followers not to worry. He had just finished teaching them that they have a Father in Heaven who cares for them (Matt 6:9-13). He then instructs His listeners about how to deal with challenges to that reality.
 1. The Greek word translated worry (take no thought in the KJV) comes from a root word that means to part and can be translated divide. The word means a distracting care. It isn't necessarily wicked. It just takes our attention off of God and His promise to take care of us.
 2. Note that Jesus said: Look at the birds and flowers. You'll notice that they are taken care of by your Heavenly Father. An unseen source provides them real help. And you matter more to Him than birds and flowers. Put your focus back on the way things really are.
 3. When challenges come your way (not enough food or clothing) don't let them distract you from the way things really are.
3. Challenges generate thoughts in our mind. That's perfectly normal. But you must make the effort to put your attention back on the way things really are and not let the thoughts distract you.
 - a. When thoughts go through our mind we pick them up and begin to feed on them. But, according to Jesus there are certain thoughts we shouldn't engage with. Jesus said in v31: Take no thought saying. In His example He includes this question: Where am I going to get food and clothing?
 1. That is a reasonable question in the face of lack. But, if you engage with it, you must know the correct answer: My Father will help me. I matter more than a bird or flower.
 2. We have a tendency to engage and answer questions based only on what we see and feel, and

then we let that thought and the incorrect answer lead to other, even more dire, thoughts.

- b. We must learn to exercise self-control in our mind. We all tend to engage with thoughts that we should stop in their tracks. How can you tell if that is what you are doing? Consider these points.
 1. Is this a circumstance that you can actually do something about or take an action that will bring it to a definitive conclusion? If not, then you don't need to be thinking about it.
 2. Are the thoughts you are thinking building you up or tearing you down, encouraging or discouraging you? If it is the latter, then you don't need to be thinking about it.
 3. Are your thoughts about what is actually happening or about what might or might not happen? If it's the latter, then you don't need to be thinking about it.
 - A. As part of Jesus' instructions on not being distracted (or worried) He said: don't borrow tomorrow's troubles. v34--So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today (NLT).
 - B. We often let something that hasn't happen and may never happen ruin today. We let a potential future event completely shape the present moment. That ought not be.
 - C. If it's something that is definitely going to happen and you can't stop it, put your focus on reality as it truly is: Nothing can come against you that bigger than God.
- c. We said this several lessons ago, but it's worth repeating now. All of us need what I call a sight on Savior (SOS) phrase—a truth from God's Word that can get our attention back where it should be (on reality as it truly is) when our thoughts and emotions are raging.
 1. For me personally, my SOS phrase is: This isn't bigger than God. That in turn leads me to begin to praise the Lord in the face of what has come my way.
 2. Take no thought saying: James 3:2 compares the tongue to a rudder on a ship. That's how you turn it around. That's how we turn ourselves, our attention back to what really matters, to the way things really are. We proclaim the truth in our situation. It's not bigger than God!
 3. This isn't a confession formula. It's not about saying the right thing the right way the right number of times. It's about recognizing that there is more to reality than what we see and feel in the moment and choosing to proclaim the way things really are according to Almighty God Who cannot lie and Who is faithful to keep His Word.
- D. Conclusion: We haven't said all we need to about focusing on Jesus. But consider these points as we close.
 1. If you are going to become unmovable in the face of life's challenges you must deal with your mind. You cannot let it run wild. You must become conscious of what you are focusing your attention on. You will not be successful at this without becoming a regular, systematic reader of the New Testament.
 2. Jesus prefaced His statement that we can be of good cheer (or encouraged) in the face of life's challenges with the statement that He gives us His Word so that we can have peace. John 16:33
 3. Ps 119:165--Great peace have they who love Your law (God's Word); nothing shall offend them or make them stumble (Amp). More next week!