

FIGHT TO FOCUS

- A. Introduction: John 14:27; John 16:33—Jesus promised to give His people peace. The Greek word that is translated peace has the idea of peace of mind. Peace of mind is freedom from disquieting (troubling) or anxious thoughts and emotions (*Webster's Dictionary*).
1. Peace of mind comes to us primarily through the Word of God (the Bible) because God's Word gives us important information about our lives and our circumstances.
 - a. The Bible gives us peace of mind by showing us the big picture—why we exist and where we're headed. This information gives us purpose, identity, and hope. Eph 1:4-5; II Tim 1:9; etc.
 1. God created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ, and He made the earth to be a home for Himself and His family. Both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin. Because of Adam's disobedience, a curse of corruption and death has infused the human race and the earth. Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Rom 8:20; etc.
 2. Jesus, by His death and resurrection, paid the price for sin and opened the way for sinners to become holy, righteous sons and daughters of God, through faith in Him. Jesus will come again to restore the earth to pre-sin conditions, bring the throne of Heaven to earth, and establish His visible eternal kingdom here. God and His family will live forever on this earth, renewed and restored. God's plan for a family in a beautiful home will be completed. John 1:12-13; Acts 3:21; Rev 21-22; etc.
 - b. The Bible gives us peace of mind by assuring us that everything in this present damaged world is temporary and subject to change by the power of God, either in this life or the life to come. No matter what we are facing, it's not too big for God. And He will get us through until He gets us out.
 2. Peace of mind does not mean that you never have another troubling thought or emotion. Life in a fallen world is filled with challenges that automatically generate troubling emotions and thoughts. Peace of mind comes from knowing how to answer thoughts and emotions according to the Word of God.
 - a. Obviously, you can't do this if you are not a Bible reader. That's why I've spent so much time this year encouraging you to become a regular Bible reading—along with giving you a strategy to do so.
 1. Recently, we've pointed out that we have an enemy (the devil) who battles us in our mind. He presents us with lies about God, ourselves, and our circumstances in an attempt to sway us from faith in God. Our protection against these lies is the Truth—the Word of God. Eph 6:11-12
 2. To experience peace of mind, we need become aware of what is going on in our mind. We can't let it run wild. We must learn to identify thoughts and thinking patterns that are contrary to the Word of God and counteract them with the Truth: It is written. Matt 4:1-11
 - b. Last week we introduced another element to our discussion—the importance of learning to focus on Jesus. Focusing on Jesus is not a new age practice where you imagine Him in your mind.
 1. To focus on Jesus is another way of saying: Focus on the Word of God. Jesus is the Living Word of God, the Word made flesh (John 1:1; John 1:14). Jesus, the Living Word, is revealed in the written Word, the Bible (John 5:39).
 2. To focus on the Word of God means to learn to see everything (your circumstances, yourself, and others) according to what the Bible says. Obviously, you cannot do this if you are not a Bible reader. We have more to say in tonight's lesson.
- B. Matt 13:18-23—In the last few lessons we've made reference to a parable Jesus told where He compared the preaching of God's Word to a sower sowing seed. According to Jesus' parable, God's Word produces different results in peoples' lives depending on each individual's response to His Word.
1. There are many lessons to be learned from Jesus' parable, but we are focusing on two main points.
 - a. Matt 13:19-21—Jesus said that the devil comes to steal the Word from the hearer. The devil cannot

take it from you. He must talk you into giving it up. We must recognize that we are all more vulnerable to his strategies in hard times (persecution, affliction, and tribulation) when we are weakened by emotional and physical distress.

- b. Matt 13:22-23—Jesus also said that the cares of this world can choke the Word of God and prevent it from producing results in our lives.
 1. The Greek Word that is translated cares means to draw in different directions, or that which causes you to be distracted. To distract means to draw or divert the attention or the mind to a different object (*Webster's Dictionary*).
 2. There are all kinds of distractions in this world that pull our attention away from the Lord and His Word. They aren't all necessarily sinful; some of them need to be attended to. However, we must learn how to deal with distractions without losing our focus on God through His Word.
2. Let's look at some examples of people who were distracted from Jesus (the Word of God) and became anxious and fearful as a result. The first is Martha, sister of Lazarus and Mary.
 - a. Luke 10:38-42—Jesus and his disciples visited the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. While Jesus was teaching, Mary sat at Jesus' feet listening, as Martha prepared refreshments for the group.
 1. Martha approached Jesus with the fact that she was doing all the work, and Mary ought to help. Clearly, Martha expected Jesus to side with her. But He reprimanded Martha and commended Mary. Jesus said Mary chose what is most important and won't be taken away from her.
 2. According to Jesus, Martha was cumbered about much serving (v40, KJV). Cumbered means to draw around, draw away, and has the idea of being over-occupied with a thing—Martha was worrying over the big dinner she was preparing (v40, NLT).
 3. Jesus also said that Martha was careful about many things (v41). The Greek word translated careful is a form of the same word translated cares of this world in Jesus' parable of the sower and the seed. In other words, focusing on distractions made Martha troubled and anxious.
 - b. Note this point. Martha was a follower of Jesus and she wasn't doing anything sinful. Providing refreshments for guests is a necessary task and can sometimes command your full attention. So what was the problem here—besides the fact that Martha has no peace of mind?
 1. When we are distracted by life's troubles and tasks, we are more vulnerable to the lies (mental strategies) of the devil. What thoughts may have been going through Martha's head?
 - A. Possibly: I do all the work around here. Mary is a bad sister. I'm being disrespected and taken advantage of. How dare they treat me like this! What will people think of me if the food isn't perfect?
 - B. These kinds of thoughts don't lend themselves to Christ-like behavior. These thoughts are based on speculation. Martha can't know the motives of others or what they're thinking.
 2. In the parable of the sower and the seed Jesus said that in times of trouble, people are offended (Matt 13:21, KJV) and fall away (ESV)—give up the Word of God and faith in God.
 - A. The Greek word that is translated offended and fall away means to entrap. It comes from a word that refers to the trigger of a trap on which bait is placed. When the animal touches it by taking the bait, it springs and causes the trap to close, ensnaring the animal.
 - B. When thoughts are flying and you are distracted, you're much more likely to take the bait of Satan—thoughts (fiery darts) that contradict God's Word and influence your behavior.
3. But there's more to it. Martha's priorities were off which made her more vulnerable to the distractions of life and the resulting troubling, anxious thoughts. Note that Jesus contrasted Martha's behavior with Mary who, according to Jesus had chosen to focus on what was most important. Luke 10:42
 - a. The Bible is fifty percent history, specifically redemptive history. It doesn't record everything that happened to everyone. It is a record of particular people and events that add to or in some way illustrate God's plan to redeem men and women from sin and its effects through Jesus.

- b. What happened to Martha is a real event, but it also illustrates a theme found throughout the Bible—the importance of having proper priorities. When your priorities are right and you are focused on what is most important, then you won't be anxious and troubled.
 - 1. Luke 10:41-42—Martha, Martha, the Lord answered, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her (NIV).
 - 2. Mary recognized that there are times when you must choose to turn from what is temporary (everything in this life) and put your attention on what is of eternal value (the life to come).
 - 3. Martha needed to refocus. When you focus you make adjustments so as to see more clearly; you make something the center of your attention or activity (*Webster's Dictionary*).
- c. Matt 6:25-34—Just before Jesus urged His followers not to worry about where life's necessities will come from, He talked about having a single eye. There are several lessons in Jesus' teaching about a single eye (topics for another day), but let's get the context for the point relevant to our discussion.
 - 1. Matt 6:19-20—Jesus contrasted earth (this life) with Heaven (the life to come) and urged His followers to store up treasure in Heaven and not on earth. We read this and ask: What do I need to do to store up treasure in Heaven? But that's not the point Jesus was making.
 - A. Jesus' point is—Where are your priorities? What is your focus? Your heart (the seat of your desires, feelings, i.e, the heart or mind) will be focused on what is most important to you. Matt 6:21—For your heart will always pursue what you esteem as your treasure; for your thoughts will always be on your treasure (TPT).
 - B. If your priorities are on this life only you will be plagued by worry and fear because (due to Adam's sin) everything in this life is subject to corruption, loss and death.
 - C. But when your priorities are on the life to come you recognize that life's hardships and losses are temporary and the best is yet to come in the life after this life—this earth restored and renewed. That life is forever and the treasures it holds can never be taken from you.
 - 2. In that context, Jesus refers to a single eye. Single is translated from a Greek word that means single or clear. Eye, when used figuratively, means vision. The idea here is singleness of purpose or motive. A single eye recognizes, is focused on, and lives with the awareness that there is more to life than just this life, which helps him prioritize.
 - A. Matt 6:22—The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye be in single focus, pure, sound, your whole body will be lighted (Wuest).
 - B. Light (accurate information about reality) comes from God's Word. If your focus is on the Word of God (Jesus, through the Bible) you'll live with the awareness that there is more to come. A heavenly viewpoint helps you keep this fleeting life in a damaged world in perspective. And, you'll have peace of mind no matter what is going on around you.
- C. Let's look at another example of someone who was distracted by the hardships of life and also became anxious and fearful—Peter, Jesus' close follower, and one of the original twelve disciples.
 - 1. Matt 14:22-33—Jesus sent his disciples back across the Sea of Galilee while He remained behind and went up into the hills to pray. Night fell and the disciples found themselves caught in the sea when a strong windstorm blew in, churning up dangerous waves.
 - a. About three o'clock in the morning, Jesus came to them walking on the water. The disciples mistook Jesus for a ghost (spirit) and were afraid. He immediately spoke to them (gave them His Word)—Take courage! I AM (Ex 3:14); stop being afraid (Matt 14:27, Amp).
 - b. Peter responded, Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you by walking on the water (v28, NLT). Jesus answered: Come (v29). Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus.
 - c. But when Peter looked around at the high waves stirred up by the wind, he was terrified and began

to sink. Peter cried out: Save me Lord! Jesus instantly reached out His hand, saved Peter, and they walked back to the boat together. The storm immediately ceased. Matt 14:30-32

2. Once again, this is a historical account of a real event and there are many lessons to be learned. Consider these points in connection with our discussion of distractions and learning to keep focused.
 - a. This was truly a dangerous situation. The original Greek language makes it clear that many of the waves were larger than the ship. It was not wrong for the disciples to feel fear. Faith in God never means deny that there is a real problem.
 - b. Why was there a storm on the Sea of Galilee? That's life in a sin damaged world. But, as long as Peter kept his eyes (his focus) on Jesus he was able to walk on water by the power of God. He had provision and peace of mind.
 1. These waves and the danger they presented were real, but they were also distractions because, at first, they made it look as though Jesus was not helping Peter. And because they were real, they could easily pull his attention off of Jesus and onto his situation.
 2. In this case, Peter's loss of focus actually cut him off from God's power in his circumstance. Jesus helped him anyway. But we can clearly see the importance of learning to keep our focus when we face situations where we need power from God in order to overcome.
 - c. What kinds of thoughts were flying through Peter's mind when he looked at the waves and felt fear? Probably the same thoughts that would go through your head or mine.
 1. I shouldn't have done this! Why was I so stupid to think this would work! I'm going to die! Jesus has let me down! Why did I leave all to follow Him in the first place!
 2. These are the same categories of thoughts we all experience in the hard times, when distractions pull us away from our focus, and the devil comes to steal the Word of God from us.
 - A. Many are speculation—you don't actually know how it's going to turn out because it isn't over yet. Many are lies straight from the devil—Jesus has never let anyone down!
 - B. Many are issues we can't do anything about—you can't change what you've done and, in yourself, you have no power to change your situation. So why waste mental energy on it?
 3. Even the worst possible outcome in this situation was not bigger than God. Even if Peter had drowned, that would not have been the end for Peter—because there is life after this life. And the life to come far outshines this life. That realization brings us peace of mind and hope in the midst of life's greatest hardships. Matt 19:27-29
 - d. Peter momentarily put his focus back on Jesus and cried out: Save me! Jesus was right there to help Peter. Evidently, Peter walked almost all the way to Jesus before the distractions got him.
 1. Jesus didn't abandon Peter—He helped His disciple and friend. But Jesus did rebuke Peter, asking him, why did you doubt? The Greek word used here has the idea of waver.
 2. To waver means to vacillate in uncertainty or fluctuate between two choices. We waver when we have no focus. We waver because we need to refocus—put our attention back on the way things really are according to the Word of God.
- C. Conclusion: Consider this point as we close. I can't tell you specifically how to address the distractions in your life. I can only tell you that we must realize that there are distractions and learn to recognize them.
1. Some you must look away from completely. Others you attend to, while still keeping your priorities in order. Sometimes you have to fight to keep your focus where it should be. But it's worth the effort.
 2. Regular Bible reading helps you develop an eternal perspective which helps you set your priorities. And it gives you something to focus on besides what you see and feel in the midst of your circumstances.
 3. Lots more next week.