

The Encouragement Newsletter



FOCUS

The year 2017 brought so many things to our nation and world. Namely, the political landscape of our nation brought so much uncertainty into our world. Many have feelings of anger, hostility, frustration, worry, and hopelessness. The devastation we see at home and abroad makes our hearts both heavy and saddened. To add to this, we have to deal with life as it happens to us personally. However, in all this, we can all agree that we have witnessed the Lord's faithfulness despite what has transpired. The Lord is not moved by our political climate nor the issues of our day. As Alpha and Omega, He already knows the end from the beginning. Because we know this, we must be vigilant in remaining focused. In this newsletter, I want to encourage you to have a goal of intentional FOCUS in 2018 and beyond. Looking at life and the things affecting us from the Lord's viewpoint or vantage point is our only option. Otherwise, we will be tossed to and fro with every wind. This type of FOCUS will require us to be firmly fixed in our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

To get a simple, yet complex definition, I went to Dictionary.com. FOCUS is defined as -

Noun - A central point, as of attraction, attention, and activity.

Verb - To bring to a to direct one's attention or effects; cause to converge on a perceived point; to concentrate - to focus one's thoughts.

With these definitions, we can conclude that Jesus is our central point of attraction and attention. He is the one we **must** direct our attention and thoughts in all we put our hands to do.

I wish I could achieve ultimate focus with just a spoken word. You know – name it, claim it and it is yours immediately... No waiting and no effort on my part, but that is not going to happen. There is always something vying for my attention. We sometimes get lost in what to focus on, who to focus on, why and how to focus. Adding e-mail, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Periscope, CNN, radio, and over 700 television channels to choose from to this list, gaining focus can be a big challenge every day. I know you can agree. Some days we experience success and other days we wonder why did we waste time focusing on certain non-productive things. This is why we must be vigilant and intentional because it will take a lot of effort and discipline to change our behavior and direct our attention to the Lord's focus for our life. This is what will set us apart from the average person – those who know the Lord and those who do not. A focused person is not wrapped up in the flurry of activity and missing their focus point. They are Holy Spirit led and directed in all areas of life. Some will say, that is over the top, well Jesus was over the top then. He said, I do not do anything unless my Father says, I say what He says and do what He says to do.

John 5:19-20

¹⁹Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. ²⁰For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.

(Also See - John 8:28-29; John 12:49)

Jesus had to be focused in order to fulfill the purpose or cause for coming into the world. Jesus' journey was filled with all sorts of distractions, but He remained focused to do the will of the Father. For us, the journey will be no different and we must remain steadfast and unmovable. (See *1 Corinthians 15:58*)

We have to ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see and open our ears to hear. In *2 Kings 6:17*, Elisha prayed for the Lord to open his servant's eyes. When the servant's eyes were opened, he saw something he could not see before. We have to pray the same things for ourselves so that we can see what we do not see now and then do what we have never done before.

WHAT HAPPENS WITH A LACK OF FOCUS?

I have worn glasses for several years for distance and with them, I see cars, street signs, and people far off really well. If I do not wear them, the street signs look vastly different and people...Oh my, I may not even recognize familiar people from afar. With my glasses, everything is plain and clear. Without them, everything just takes on a different form and shape. My friend Verna and I communicate quite a bit. When she sends text messages, it is evident when she typing with glasses versus without glasses. Because I know her, I can make out the discombobulated text since most of the time it is the continuation of a conversation we were already having. But, there are times, I have to respond, "I didn't get it" and I include the glasses emoji. It is so funny and we turn it into a joke, but the point is, without wearing glasses, we do not have the right focus and cannot see clearly.



This is what happens when we lack focus. We do not see clearly. We are hitting the wrong buttons. We are going after the wrong things. We are entangled with yokes that keep us in bondage. We need spiritual glasses to focus and see clearly so that we can respond, react, and behave as victorious sons and daughters of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, when people read us, our life is articulating the correct words of Life.

WHY SHOULD WE FOCUS?

There are many reasons I can give, but I will limit my list to a few thoughts. As you read them, make it personal and allow the Holy Spirit to add to this list.

~We are Representatives of Christ In the Earth~
Believe it or not, Christ depends on us to represent Him well. When our children are in public, we expect them to behave like they have "home training". We

expect them to exhibit the behavior and mannerisms taught them in private. We also teach them that just because others are misbehaving, they are to remain focused on what they have learned at home rather than join in with those acting out. I know it does not always happen, but it does not take away our expectations. Jesus expects us to do the same. We learn how to have our hearts fixed on him in our private times and in the secret place (away from the public) where the Lord teaches us how to be focused. Then when we get in the public eye, we understand Who we represent and represent Him well. (See *Hebrews 12:1* and *Colossians 3*)

~We Do Not Want to Faint and Lose heart.~

We have so much going on around us and it is easy to look on what is happening and get oppressed or depressed. The enemy is waiting and watching. If you have been saved any length of time, you know that the enemy will come with so many accusations against the Lord and if we entertain the thoughts, we will become disheartened and say the Lord is not faithful. I am here to tell you that we can stand on *Philippians 1:6* - "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it". Actually, *Philippians 1:6* begins with something very important. It begins with the powerful words, "Being confident of this very thing". Being confident is to be persuaded, to have trust, and to believe. We must stand on this and not become weary in well doing (*Galatians 6:9*); even if we feel weary, which is normal, we just need to remember *Isaiah 40:28-29* "He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength".

Paul says twice in *2 Corinthians 4* "...We do not lose heart" (verses 1 and 16). Reading Chapter 3, Paul talks about the veil over their eyes of the children of Israel and how they could not see because their minds were blinded; however, when one turns to the Lord the veil is removed. With the unveiled face (nothing shielding us or holding us back) we behold the glory of the Lord and become transformed. With the veil removed, there is no longer a barrier. When we look at life through His eyes, we will focus and not lose heart because our faith rises as we go from glory to glory and faith to faith in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ - even in our most challenging circumstances we can arise and not lose heart.

~We Want to Always Look at the BIG Picture~

I stated earlier that there are so many distractions coming at us every day. Included in these distractions are irritations and frustrations. The things that easily beset us. You know the things that may get us "going". Things that cause our blood pressure to rise and boil. Distractions could also be looking at what others are doing with their life - their success and failures. You know Facebook, Instagram, etc. can cause us to be so absorbed with what is going on in the life of other people that we lose sight of the Lord's direction. The Lord want us to look at the big picture for our life and not be absorbed

with what others are doing. The BIG Picture is really the future picture. It is what he has planned for us. We should not look at what is seen, but what is unseen, that is the big picture as II Corinthians 4:18 tells us. The seen is temporal and the unseen is eternal. Although what we see is fading, it is still a reality to us. So, I do not want to make light of the challenges we face, but II Corinthians 4:18 is saying we do not “fix our eyes” upon our affliction. The BIG is the assignment of the Lord here on earth and being occupied with His purpose until He comes. The BIG Picture is also larger than what we are facing. The Lord has a plan and it is for our success. Or, better yet, His success through us. Our life is truly about him succeeding through us – His representatives.

The BIG Picture is also the individual word of the Lord spoken over our life. We are pressing towards His mark every day. We are reaching forward and we will have challenges in our press. Pressing means there will be resistance, but the resistance is just strength training. We must be seekers of the Lord’s wisdom and “how to” plan. We see in I Samuel 23:2, I Samuel 30:8, and II Samuel 5:19, David did not just go up and fight in battles because he thought he could win, he sought the Lord for the battle plan. It was about the BIG Picture – the victory of Israel.

Lastly on this note, we cannot do it alone; we need the Holy Spirit because He will comfort, lead, and guide. In addition to the Holy Spirit, we need other strong soldiers that know God. I mean really KNOW God. They have been tried, tested and proven by Him. Too many try to go it alone instead of reaching out to others, who are stable and strong. We know Moses was a leader who needed someone to hold his hands up so that the battle could be won and Israel undefeated. In the beginning, he was doing fine holding up own his hands by himself, but there came a point when he became weary and needed help. (See *Exodus 17:11-13*) You know, we all need the same thing. This principle is not just for those in leadership over the people of God. We need someone on our left and right to hold up our hands with support, prayer, and encouragement so that we will not be defeated in the battle. If you do not have anyone, earnestly seek the Lord for someone to stand on your left and right. These are also the individuals who will help you see the BIG Picture when things look bleak and hopeless.

HOW DO WE GET AND REMAIN FOCUSED?

You have probably seen some “How Tos” as you read, but here are a few more. Again, as you read them, make it personal and allow the Holy Spirit to add to this list.

- **Acknowledge that You Need Focus.** Help will not come to us as long as we believe we are self-sufficient and do not need the help of the Holy Spirit or those around us. Thinking we are self-sufficient is only the pride of life; we need to repent if we have acted as if we are self-sufficient, and then acknowledge our need of Him. After repentance, we are on our way. (James 4:6-10 and Proverbs 3:5-6)
- **Keep Your Ear to His Mouth.** The Lord is always speaking, but we are not always listening. It is imperative we listen and then obey in order to remain focused on His purpose. (Isaiah 50: 4-5)
- **Pray.** Praying is essential to the life of a believer. We are to pray without ceasing (I Thessalonians 5:17) and with prayer and supplication make our request known (Psalm 30:8, Ephesians 6:18, and Philippians 4:6-7).
- **Hide His Word in Your Heart.** This goes hand-in-hand with prayer. This is essential for every believer as well. How much we know about God is determined by how much we know His word. This is a season to go deeper and move away from the cliché scriptures and receive a new revelation of the God we serve. His word will bring stability to our soul. (Psalms 119:11, Psalms 119:105 and James 1:22-25)
- **Avoid Being Distracted and Taken of Course by the Winds.** Winds come to blow us off focus on the plan and purpose of God for our life. Winds will always come, but we must stay grounded. (Ephesians 4:14)
- **Fix Your Eyes on the Author and Finisher of Your Faith.** This is the last bullet and like the others, it will take discipline to do, but being rock solid in our faith we will not be easily move. (Hebrews 12:2)

I could go on and on, but will end here. For some of you, 2017 has ended on a low note of uncertainty, discouragement and despair, but I want to encourage you to do as the hymn says “Turn your eyes upon Jesus and look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace”. For others, it ended on a high. You experienced breakthroughs that gave hope for 2018. No matter how 2017 ended, God is still good and His mercy endures forever to all generations. We do not know what 2018 will hold, but must remain confident in the Lord Jesus Christ. He will give us the strength and grace for the new year because He is truly in control. The author of purpose and holds our destiny in His hands. Let’s hold to His truth and...

REMAIN FOCUSED.