

## **Keeping your focus on God – Arrie Preller**

For a long time I had a note on my office wall saying: “*It is impossible to do God’s work without God’s power.*” I believed (and still believe!) those words with all my heart. Yet, I often found myself becoming so busy with the things of God that I had no time left for God Himself! It felt so wrong!

Too often I became spiritually dry while doing God’s work. Was my life not supposed to be like a well-watered garden, Isaiah 58:11? I knew I had to change. Yet, I struggled (and still struggle at times) to keep God Himself *practically* at the top of my priority list.

Can you identify with my frustration? Do you want to grab all the opportunities to serve God, but in the end find you have no time to sit at the feet of Jesus? Are you tempted to serve God in your own power? Is it difficult for you to say “no” when a worthy project comes up (even when you know saying “yes” will be at the expense of your family or your personal relationship with God)?

What we need, is a constant reminder to keep our focus on God. Don’t concentrate on the things we can do for God, but concentrate on God Himself! Only He can fulfill all our needs and desires. I invite you, reader, to look with me at the Bible for some suggestions on keeping your of focus on God.

### **Why is it important to keep your focus on God?**

God is all-knowing and all-powerful. He has the whole world and all its people in His hand and He can do with them whatever He wants. He gives life and death as it pleases Him. Our lives belong to God! For that reason we shall be wise to focus on Him, so that we can learn from Him.

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do,” Ephesians 2:10. There are so many possibilities that we could do for God. But it is wise first to ask Him what He wants us to do! God has some specific tasks in mind for you and me!

Jesus serves as a good example of how to focus on God. He said: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work”, John 4:34. He also said in John 6:38 “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me”. Jesus could do so many things, yet He chose to do only the activities that the Father wanted Him to do.

When we focus on God, He can show us what He wants us to do. It will not make us less busy, but it will make us more productive in our many activities! Everyday we must learn to say to God, with David when he was being hunted, "My times are in your hands", Psalm 31:15.

**Start your focus by understanding that God alone can satisfy your spiritual needs**

"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" Psalm 42:1-2.

The writers of this Psalm knew what it meant to be close to God. They also knew something of how important water is in a hot, dry country. For that reason they used the illustration of a gazelle's thirst for water to express their intense desire for fellowship with God.

At some point in their lives they had met with the living God in a very personal way. It was as if they had experienced the freshness of clean, cool, living waters flowing over their souls. These people knew nothing else would ever again satisfy their spiritual thirst. They could not be deceived to go after other sources promising spiritual refreshment. In other words, their focus was on God, the Refresher of their souls.

The taste of God's goodness made them thirsty for more. Then a time of crisis came. People mocked them. Their circumstances brought doubt to their hearts. What did they do when everything was against them? They focused on God.

It was as if they cried out: "Oh, God, We need You! We need You! We need You! You alone can satisfy! Without Your presence in our lives we shall die. We do not need sermons about You, important as they are. We do not need discussions and lectures on who You are. We do not need things to do for You. We need YOU!"

Have you ever experienced something of this longing in your own life? Is God such a Reality to You? Do you thirst for His presence in your daily life?

Jesus promised to open a fountain flowing with living waters in the hearts of those who come to Him John 4:14. This fountain will do two, apparently contradictory, things. It will satisfy your deepest inner thirst *and* it will make you thirsty for more of God! This is what focusing on God will do to you!

The way to start is to “taste and see that the Lord is good”, see 1 Peter 2:3. Allow God to start a new work in your life right now! As you focus on God, enjoy Him. Meditate on “My soul finds rest in God alone”, Psalm 62:1 and “O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water”, Psalm 63:1.

### **Keeping your focus on God means you must keep your focus away from the things of this world**

There are other forces around us, and even inside us, pulling us away from God. It is a reality that we must face seriously. When we start to focus on the many activities (good and bad) around us we can easily lose our focus on God. We have to choose our focus in our daily lives.

Try to think of a suuq (market) with many shiny items and tasty food. The items are displayed in such ways that you cannot help to look and smell their mouth-watering flavours. As you walk through the suuk you have to make choices. Where will you stop and what will you buy? The world we live in can be compared to a big suuk. We must choose where to put our focus. Our focus on God is the foundation on which we must build all our other decisions.

Remember the words of 1 John 2:15-17 “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever”.

### **Identify the forces that try to steal your focus away from God**

Satan displays sin in a very tempting way at this imaginary world suuq. He encourages us to “take just one bite” knowing very well that we shall not stop after tasting the sweet, but poisonous, pleasures on sale. The world encourages us to take. If we refuse, people laugh at us or become angry and critical. There is also our old sinful nature. It is drawing us to these temptations as a thirsty horse is drawn by the smell of water. These are the realities of life. We have to constantly stand against temptations from within and without. If we understand the motives of these forces and the results if we were to obey their voices, we will begin to fight against them.

## **Stand against these forces by focusing on God and His strength!**

In our struggles we often find that we do not have the strength to stand alone. We will find it hard to fight against a certain temptation, for example: pride, impatience, an unforgiving attitude, wrong sexual activity, overeating to name just a few.

At the time of temptation we either turn away from God, saying He will understand that we are only human, or we will turn to God asking for His help to overcome.

When turning our focus to God it is important to understand that it is never a shame to acknowledge our own weakness. King Jehoshaphat was faced with enemies that were too strong for him. He did not rely on his strength or his own plans. He focused on God! Listen to his prayer: "O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this great army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you", 2 Chronicles 20:12.

In Hebrews 12:1-3 we are encouraged to keep our eyes on Jesus. Then we will not become weary and faint. Ephesians 6:10 urges us "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power". We are so weak. But remember, our God is all-powerful!

God wants to help us. He has the power to do so too. However, He will only use His power when we allow Him to take total control of our lives. Focusing on God does not mean a quick look in His direction before we continue following our own plans. Focusing on God means that we surrender every single one of our plans to Him. Then we ask Him to guide us and to teach us how to live.

## **Understand there are activities that are not sinful, but they still steal focus away from God**

There are good activities that after some time may steal our spiritual joy and strength. Accepting all the opportunities we are offered to serve God may not always be the right thing to do. Becoming too busy with God's things is actually wrong! Beware of becoming so busy with the things of God that you have no time left for the God of all these things!

Then there are "time wasters" that we must be aware of and guard against. It is important to make time for relaxing, but we must also understand how easily we can waste hours in too many enjoyable activities. Reading the newspaper, listening to the radio, watching television or talking with friends

about politics, are not wrong. But they surely can steal away a lot of our valuable time if we don't keep them under careful control!

**Understand that focusing on God is not something that will happen by itself! It needs disciplined action from your side**

In the world we live in focusing on God is not an easy thing. It does not happen automatically. Good focus takes effort and discipline.

Oswald Chambers wrote: "*Practice* means continually doing that which no one sees or knows but us. Habit is the result of practice – by continually doing a thing it becomes second nature ... We have to learn to form habits according to the dictates of the Spirit. The power and the practice must go together"<sup>1</sup> Take note of his wise words!

We have to choose daily how we want to live our own lives. We have to decide what thoughts to allow into our minds. The way to choose the life God intends for us is to constantly focus on God!

**Practical steps on how you can focus on God in a busy world**

Never give up developing your focus on God. Even if it sometimes feels as if you are failing, continue to work on it. Do not allow Satan to lie to you by saying you cannot change, or that God is so disappointed in you that He will not really forgive you letting Him down again.

Get a workable plan on how you can spend time alone with God. You need that precious time to face all the challenges in the day ahead of you! Try to find a time and a place on a daily basis where you can be alone with God.

Be creative if you live in an environment where you are never alone. Go for a walk on your own, and sit in the bush or on the edge of a field. Think of how you can spend some vital time alone with God. Remember what Jesus did: "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed", Luke 5:16.

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<sup>1</sup> Oswald Chambers Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, God's Character and the Believers Conduct (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers) 1995, page 32.

Focus on God through praise and worship. As we read “praise portions” in the Bible, or we sing songs of worship and pray prayers of praise, they all help us to appreciate God more. We think about who He is and what He does.

Focus on God in the simple things of daily life. Although it is very important to set aside specific time for prayer and Bible reading we must also learn to “see” God out in everyday life.

Talk to at least one person about God’s goodness every day. If possible, find a friend with whom you can share your struggles and joys. Make time to pray with him or her regularly.

Fill your minds and hearts with God in as many ways as you possibly can. Then you will find new joy, more power and a greater peace. As we focus on Him He rightly receives all glory, honour and power!

## **Discussion guide**

*Using this chapter and Scriptures quoted:*

1. In your life and work what takes your focus away from God Himself?

Share examples of being busy but not being as productive as you should be for God.

2. What makes you thirsty for God? and what do you find takes that thirst away? Psalm 42.

3. Realise where the world pulls you away from God and decide the best way to fight against it.

Review your recent week alongside 1 John 2:15-17, listening to the Holy Spirit’s diagnosis.

4. “Accepting all the opportunities we are offered to serve God may not always be the right thing to

do”. Explain *why* this is true.

Consider the importance of discernment and being able to say, “No”!

Acts 16:6-10; Acts 21:10-15.

5. “Be still and know that I am God”, Psalm 46:10.

Share examples of good practice in your own life – what has worked for you to keep God

central.

Learning from yourself and from others, make a workable plan for regular “*still time*” with God.

Exodus 14:13-14; 1 Samuel 12:12-16; Nehemiah 8:9-11; Psalm 37:1-7.