



## Defying the Odds by Staying Focused

### - THE ODDS ARE, AT SOME POINT...

- You will experience set-backs...*people are watching.*
- You will question your effort, integrity or faith...*people are watching.*
- You will be tempted to compromise...*people are watching.*
- You will want to quit...*people are watching.*
- Get through these times, regroup, and get back on track...*and people are watching.*

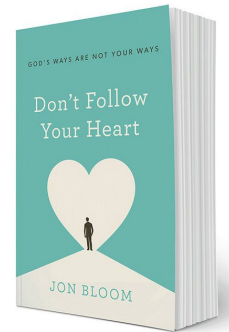
## THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING!

### - WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT STAYING FOCUSED?

- **Focusing on what God wants for you and from you.**
  - *No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. But we must hold on to the progress we have already made. (Philippians 3:13–16 NLT-SE)*
  - *And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness. Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ. (Colossians 2:6–8 NLT-SE)*
- **Focusing on Good, Righteousness & Truth**
  - *And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. (Philippians 4:8 NLT-SE)*
    - Hell wages a war of disorientation. Through temptation, condemnation, intimidation, discouragement, disappointment, doubt, illness, weakness, weariness, and appeals to our pride and shame, the spiritual

powers of evil seek to keep us off-balanced, confused, and turned around. For if we lose our focus on the truth, we lose our confidence and may lose our faith. ~ **Job Bloom**, *Don't Follow Your Heart*

- *Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. Cry out for insight, and ask for understanding. Search for them as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures. Then you will understand what it means to fear the LORD, and you will gain knowledge of God. (Proverbs 2:2-5 NLT-SE)*



- **Focusing on Eternity**

- *For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 NLT-SE)*
- *Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. (Colossians 3:2 NLT-SE)*

- **Focusing on your earthly assignment**

- *Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you. (Proverbs 4:25 NLT-SE)*
- *For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:13 NLT-SE)*
- *All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NLT-SE)*

- **Focusing on the Kingdom**

- *Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. (Matthew 6:33 NLT-SE)*
- Focusing on the church is NOT the same as focusing on the kingdom. The church tends to focus on the behavior and participation of the people. The focus of God's kingdom is His **presence** and our **obedient response** to His presence, especially when it comes to **proclaiming the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit**.

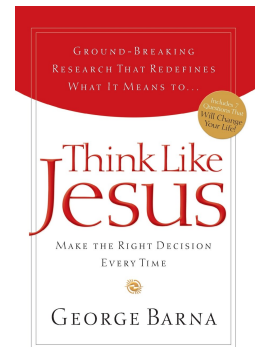
## - THE CHALLENGING SEASONS OF LIFE

- Times of **Adversity**... Have you ever experienced times when it seemed like the whole world was coming against you, like you just can't catch a break?
  - *We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies. (2 Cor. 4:8-10 NLT-SE)*
- Times of **Disappointment**... Most of us can handle things just not going our way, but how can you stay focused on what's really important when you seem to be sinking into a season of disappointment or even despair?
  - *Blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit. (Jer. 17:7-8 NLT-SE)*
- Times of **Anxiety & Fear**... The struggle against anxiety and fear is a real one. How can you stay focused when you feel emotionally trapped and overwhelmed?
  - *Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand. (Is. 41:10 NLT-SE)*

- *Whenever my doubts and fears were out of control, The soothing comfort of Your presence calmed me down and overwhelmed me with delight. (Ps 94:19 TPT)*
- Times of **Success...** It's not just the difficult times that cause us to lose our focus. Why is it sometimes even more difficult to keep your eyes fixed on Jesus when you are actually successful at what you are pursuing?
  - *The purity of silver and gold is tested by putting them in the fire; The purity of human hearts is tested by giving them a little fame. (Prov. 27:21 MESSAGE)*

## - RECOVERING OUR FOCUS

- Returning to **the Main Thing**
  - "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." ~ **Stephen Covey**
  - "Jesus in one sense was the definition of narrow-minded: His focus was solely on knowing and fulfilling the will of God. He sought to convey that theme to His followers, informing them, "I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do what I want." His great knowledge of the Scriptures would have provided Him with the content of His focus, but **how was He able to avoid the distractions and lock on to God's will?** Jesus spent time alone with God, seeking solitude to hear the voice of His Father in Heaven. He fasted in order to remind Himself to focus on God. He identified and promoted His God-given mission, seeing that purpose as the priority of His life. He prayed constantly for guidance. **The message to us is that when we passionately desire to focus on God, and invest in doing so, God will foster the connection.**" ~ **George Barna**, *Think Like Jesus*
  - **So, what is the "main thing?"** If you asked 10 of the most well-read, respected church leaders this question you would likely get at least 8 different answers, depending on which "stream" of Christianity they were from. Some would say it's the gospel. Some would likely point to getting people saved, or hosting His presence, or being like Jesus to the world around us, or discipleship. The list goes on and on. Maybe a better way to frame this question would be, "**What is the most important thing to Jesus, right here, right now?**" This seemed to be the way Jesus operated in His relationship with the Father. Jesus was focused!
- Reestablishing the **Goal**
  - **What are we aiming at?** When we are at our best, what are we focused on? Obviously, this is a very similar question. Here's the Apostle Paul's answer to that question...
    - *Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, **we make it our aim to please him.** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. (2 Cor. 5:8-10 ESV)*
  - We are not aiming at some kind of spiritual target. **It's not about numbers, but relationship.** If you are going to have a relationship with Jesus that stands out to the world around you, it is going to require authentic, dynamic, consistent focus on your part.
- Regaining **Perspective**
  - "A Chinese proverb says, "If you want to know what water is, don't ask the fish." Water is the sum and substance of the world in which the fish is immersed. The fish may not reflect on its own environment until suddenly it is thrust onto dry land, where it struggles for life. Then it realizes that water provided its sustenance." ~ **David Dockery**



- Christians everywhere recognize there is a great spiritual battle raging for the hearts and minds of men and women around the globe. We are in a cosmic struggle between **Christian truth** and a **morally indifferent culture**. David Dockery says, “We need to shape a Christian worldview and lifeview that will help us learn to think Christianly and live out the truth of Christian faith.” Here’s a great place to start...
  - *Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can’t see— such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together. Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything.* (Col. 1:15–18 NLT-SE)

## - SOME FINAL THOUGHTS ON STAYING FOCUSED

- **Relationships...** It’s really more about our relationship with Jesus than anything else. The person of Jesus is who we are to be focused on, not personal decisions, accomplishments or even the task at hand. **This is a time for more relationship, not less. The key to staying focused is not concentrating on where you’re going, but staying connected with who you’re becoming and who is orchestrating this transformation.** (John 15)
- **Advance...** In this season of COVID, we seem to be somewhat distracted with our relationship with each other. Even though this is a difficult time as far as relationship with each other, this is actually a perfect time to **intensify our relationships with God**. This is not a time to pull back, but a time to step up.
- **Faith...** This is definitely a time when we need to be **strengthening our faith**, not allowing our “faith muscle” to be weakened or subject to atrophy. Strength is typically increased in times of stress, not comfort.
  - **Example:** Stressed vines produce good wines.
    - Great wines come from low-yielding vineyards planted in marginal climates on the poorest soils. Though hard on the vines, these tough conditions are good for the wine, because the vines that are stressed must work harder to produce fruit, which leads to fewer but more concentrated and flavorful grapes.
    - By contrast, the vines used for bulk wines have it easy. They are planted in the fertile soils in ideal climates of regions such as California’s Central Valley. Such regions are great for producing tons of grapes to fill up the bulk fermentation tanks, but not at all great for producing the complex, intense flavors needed to make great wine, because the vines are not stressed and the yields are way too high. ~ **Ben Giliberti**, *It’s Not the Box, It’s the Bulk*.
    - This phenomenon of nature is also a parable for how God produces rich, complex, intense faith in his children. Because when it comes to faith, **God loves good wine**. ~ **Jon Bloom**, *Don’t Follow Your Hearts*
  - This whole process starts as we **allow God to remove anything in our lives that hinders faith**. We then begin to **position ourselves for our faith to be tested**, not protecting or even removing ourselves from situations that may test our faith. The final step is when we **expand the influence of our faith to include others**, not just ourselves and our immediate family.
- **Reality... John Mark Comer** says, “The gospel you live in, is the gospel you live out.” It’s time to make our beliefs a reality. If we believe that Jesus is Lord, shouldn’t everything in our lives point to that? If we believe that Jesus has called us to a life of compassion, devotion and faith, doesn’t it make sense that people should be able to see those things being demonstrated in our attitudes and actions? If we really believe that eternal salvation is worth Jesus’ death on the cross, why would we hesitate to share that Good News with people we love and care about? When people see this kind of **focus** demonstrated in our lives, it catches their attention and they begin to ask, **“How can I have what you have?”**