
Keep Your Focus on Jesus & The Word

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If you haven't noticed that we live in a negative world, you just haven't been paying attention.

These negative influences have been evident since sin entered the world. From natural disasters to presidential elections to a global pandemic, it's no wonder so many people struggle with expressing hope.

Add in things like sickness, the loss of a job, or marriage problems, and you can see where, over time, the pressures of the world, if allowed, can steal the love and joy from your life.

In Matthew 24:12, Jesus said this: "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will wax (grow) cold."

He said this would be a characteristic of the end times. Jesus was saying that the negative things going on around us—not necessarily in us—would cause the love of many to grow cold.

The word "waxed" used in that scripture is really significant. It goes back to the way candles are made. A wick is dipped into hot wax and then taken out and allowed to cool for a few seconds, leaving a thin layer of wax. The process is repeated hundreds of times until the wick is buried deep within the wax.

The same is true with the heart. If we take our eyes off Jesus and focus on the evil of this world and our circumstances, then, little by little, the layers of negativity harden around our hearts, and the love for God and others waxes cold.

So, how do we stay positive in a negative world? Let me start by using this verse from Joshua 1:9:

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Here, the Lord was speaking to Joshua, who was taking over for Moses—a hard act to follow. He told Joshua to be strong and of good courage and not to be afraid or dismayed. These are opposing forces. If you are afraid and dismayed, then you are not strong and of good courage. They counteract each other. So, you've got to do two things and resist two things.

The word dismay means "to fill with dread or apprehension; daunt" (American Heritage Dictionary [AHD]). Can you say you have fought apprehension (to anticipate with anxiety) about the future? Have the problems facing you or the nation seemed daunting (intimidating or discouraging)? If so, you have been dismayed.

The Lord doesn't automatically do these things for you—He flows through you. If you get discouraged or dismayed, you stop the process.

"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us." (Ephesians 3:20)

The phrase "according to" means in proportion to or to the degree of the power that is working in you. God flows through people. If you become discouraged, you stop the flow of God's power.

Here's another example. In 1 Samuel, we read the story of a terrible situation that David was facing. His father-in-

law, Saul, was trying to kill him. He had been running for his life every day for thirteen years. His possessions had been burned, his wives and all of the wives and children of his men had been taken, and his own men wanted to stone him. Not a great environment! Yet it says in 1 Samuel 30:6:

“Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.”

Things looked bleak. David was in a situation where everything in the natural said “Be discouraged and dismayed,” but David encouraged himself in the Lord. Do you know how he did it? He took the Word and began to encourage himself, and it was only a matter of hours until all God had promised him came to pass and he became king. If he had given in at that last minute, he would have lost.

I see a lot of people today who stand for a period of time and then quit. It’s like there are limits on how long they’re going to believe God. You might be thinking, Well, how long am I supposed to stand? The answer is simple. You stand on the Word of God and His promises until you’re encouraged and it works. Don’t quit!

Peter is a good example of what happens when we take our eyes off Jesus and His Word. Matthew 14:28-30 says:

And Peter answered Him and said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” So He said, “Come.” And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, “Lord, save me!”

As soon as Peter got his eyes off Jesus and looked at the stormy sea, he began to sink. Think about that—he couldn’t have walked on the water if the sea had been perfectly calm. All that really happened was his focus changed. Instead of focusing on the promise of Jesus—His command to come—Peter focused on the circumstances, and that is why he began to sink.

If you can maintain your focus on Jesus and His Word in the midst of a storm, you can walk on the water of circumstance. When the doctor says you have cancer, your boss tells you you’re being laid off, or your spouse says they’re leaving, you can still stay positive. It will take a deliberate effort, but it is absolutely crucial.

You need to recognize that Satan is using the evil and negative things of this world to discourage you, even if they are not your personal problems.

You can get discouraged watching politics, reading the newspaper, and listening to the news. If you don’t resist this, it will cause you to be discouraged and dismayed, and worst of all, your love for God to grow cold (Matt. 24:12).

The Bible says in Isaiah 26:3 that the Lord will “keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed” upon Him because he trusts in Him. Our peace is linked directly to what we think. We are plugged into this world like no group of Christians has ever been—reading, listening, and watching the same ungodliness as the world and then wondering why we get the same results. It’s simple—garbage in, garbage out.

I’m telling you, unless you have a deliberate plan to encourage yourself in the Lord, you aren’t going to be encouraged. It is not normal to be encouraged; it’s normal to be discouraged. It’s abnormal to be strong and of good courage, but it is certainly doable. God’s Word will tell you exactly how to do it.