

## "Staying Focused"

The Flying Wallendas are known as arguably the greatest family of aerialists and tightrope walkers in the world. Their daredevil circus act became famous for performing death-defying stunts without a safety net. However, even though the family had faced several tragic accidents, those tragedies on the high wire were not enough to prevent this family from continuing with their stunts. Founder Karl Wallenda said, "Life is being on the wire; everything else is just waiting." Holding to that philosophy, on March 22, 1978, Karl attempted to walk between the two towers of the ten-story Condado Plaza Hotel in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on a wire stretched 121 feet above the pavement. Although known for his attention to detail and his deep concentration on the task, at age 73, Karl fell to his death when winds exceeded 30 miles per hour. Later, Karl's wife recalled that before her husband had fallen, for the first time since she had known him, he had become more focused on falling instead of on walking the tightrope. He had personally supervised the attachment of the guide wires, which he had never done in 67 years of performing. Oftentimes, the difference between success and failure is found in the direction which we are focused.

During my early twenties, Moody Bible Institute professor William Thrasher made a statement in class that made a profound impact upon my life. He said, "One of the great secrets of the Christian life is to choose one thing and do it well all of your life for the Lord." Such a philosophy sounds foreign in our society which boasts of ability to multi-task and be diverse. However, the danger we face is a generation that is becoming a jack-of-all-trades but a master of none. In James 1:8, James writes, "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways." It is the picture of someone who hesitates and wavers while being pulled in two directions. As a consequence, nothing really ever gets done. The effectiveness of our lives is directly associated with the focus of our hearts. The heart of Jesus had a focus "...to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work." At the end, Jesus would cry from the cross, "It is finished." The heart of Paul was focused running a race of honor and avoiding disqualification. At the end, Paul would say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course..." Where we place our focus is generally the direction we find ourselves going. A well-focused life will make possible a well-finished life. How do you keep life in focus when everything around you is a blur?

Staying focused will demand **being removed from our distractions**. In Matthew 14, Peter dared to walk where no other would walk with Jesus; on a stormy sea! However, we are told in verse 30, "But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried..." The distraction of the storm would bring Peter's miraculous moment to an end. No matter how much success a man has achieved, his life will begin to sink when his attention is drawn away from Jesus. When a lion tamer enters a cage of lions, he carries both whips and pistols. However, they tell us the most important tool he carries is a stool. Why? A lion becomes confused when trying to focus on all four legs at the same time and is quickly overwhelmed with a sense of paralysis when its attention is divided. While distractions are inevitable in a busy and stressful world, the secret is minimizing their influence. Noah faced the distraction of scoffers, but he never stopped building the ark. Joseph faced the distraction of disappointment, but he never stopped trusting God's plan. Daniel faced the distraction of intimidation, but he kept on kneeling to pray to his God. As an ancient Greek fabulist once wrote, "Beware lest you lose the substance by grasping at the shadow." It is worth remembering that a single distraction can hold a lifetime of regret.

Staying focused will demand **being resolved in our direction**. In Isaiah 50:7, it is prophesied of Christ, "...I set My face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed." It was describing the courage in His firm resolve to never shrink away from the great purpose He had been given. Jesus knew exactly what He had to do and nothing could derail Him from fulfilling the will of the Father. Although every detail may not be understood, once we are convinced that a particular course of direction is God's will, we must be undaunted in our effort to follow and fulfill it. Far too many golden opportunities of life never come to pass because we are always waiting until the time is right, or until we can afford it, or until we can figure it all out. What if Abraham had waited for God to supply him with a map? What if Nehemiah had waited on God to provide the blueprints? What if Esther had waited for God to speak through a burning bush? Those who walk with God are able to bring clearly into focus those things the rest of the world will miss. The more obsessed we are with following God, the more confident we find are the steps we take. And, the

world will stand in line to follow a man who knows where he is going.

Staying focused will demand **being restrained in our desires**. In Colossians 3:2, Paul writes, "Set your affection on things above, not on things of the earth." Jesus explained why that is so important in Matthew 6:21, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." The Lord knows how prone our nature is to gravitate toward the object at which we are staring. It is worth remembering that a disciplined stare will always prevent a disappointing life. One of the most difficult things every artist must face is how to keep a fresh perspective while staring at the same canvas for hours on end. I read of a seasoned artist who hung a sparkling diamond from the top of his easel to which he would look periodically in order to keep all of the colors on the canvas from growing dull in his sight. The only way to maintain a right perspective of this world is to make sure nothing within it sparkles brighter in our eyes than the Lord. While Abraham beheld many beautiful lands, he continually "...looked for a city...whose builder and maker is God." While Moses beheld the spectacular riches and treasures of Egypt, he was consumed with the heavenly reward still awaiting. It was St. Jerome who wrote, "A Christian's life is a state of holy desire." Any man who has taken heavenly glimpses can never be fully satisfied with earthly gains again.

Though our life may be the journey of a thousand miles, it is only accomplished one step at a time. No matter how hard a man may try, he will never take multiple strides in a single step. That is important when our journey has led us to a narrow, high wire path. In such a place, it is imperative that your heart remain fixed on the goal, and that your eyes remain fixed on your steps. You can mark it down, a defective focus will always precede a devastating fall.

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