

WHAT IS YOUR FOCUS?

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(A short teaching given by Brother Lou Carey at the April 1998 Sonlight Gospel Florida Convention held at Dunklin Memorial Camp in Okeechobee, Florida)

I want to take this opportunity to welcome you to our facility.... I am not a preacher. I am a teacher and a writer, and I deal primarily with some real basic approaches to walking out the Christian life—and specifically discipleship. Because, as I recall from scripture, Jesus did not call anybody to become a Christian. He called everybody to discipleship. It was at Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians. That is in Acts 11:26. So, I am convinced that discipleship is the call on every believer's life....

What I want to talk to you about this morning is the word, "**focus**." God does some strange things. God created us in a way that we can only focus on one thing at a time.

Now, we can do several things at a time. We can drive down the interstate, listen to the radio, chew chewing gum, talk to our passenger—we can do a lot of those things without giving it much thought. But, by the same token, if we really focus in on something while we are driving down the highway, we can drive five, or ten, or fifteen, or twenty miles and not even be conscious of what we do or how we do it. Isn't that true? So, God created us to focus on one thing at a time. Now, I am going to show you a little bit later on that Satan knows that too. And therein lies the problem.

Now, another thing about focusing is that **what we focus on—we feed**. For instance, if you have headache, and you focus on your headache, what happens to it? If you have a toothache, and you focus on your toothache—it is the same thing. Right? So, we know that, in the negative, what we focus on, we feed.

James spoke about that in James 1:15. Let us just look at it for a moment. Let us start with Verse 13. I am reading from the New American Standard Version. "*Let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God, for God cannot*

*be tempted by evil and He Himself does not tempt anyone. **But, each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.***" (And this is what I want to show you about focus and feeding): "***Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is accomplished it brings forth death.***"

You see, it is a process. It is a process of incubation. And whatever we focus on, we feed, and it incubates inside us until it brings forth something. Now, that works to the good as well as the bad. So, where we focus is extremely important.

So, how do we know where we focus? There is one sure way to discover where you focus most of your life, most of your time, most of your day. Listen to yourself talk! Whatever your self-talk is, it tells you where your focus is. **So** (You may want to chew on this a little bit), **whatever we are focused on, we are submitted to it, and whatever we are submitted to, it controls us. So, we see that focus is extremely important.**

Now, focus is also the first act of repentance. Because if we are headed the wrong way—we are walking along with the world, in a worldly way—and we get convicted about it, we change our focus. We change our direction. That is an act of repentance. So, the proper focus triggers repentance.

Now, it is funny that you brought forth the scripture that you did this morning because I had that scripture. I always feel good about that. That way I know that the Holy Spirit is involved. So, let us turn to Romans 12:1-2.

This is where we have problems with religion. This is where our performance orientation takes over, and this is the seed of a lot of frustration.

Let us read these two verses, "*I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a holy and living sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. **And do not be conformed to this world, BUT BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.***"

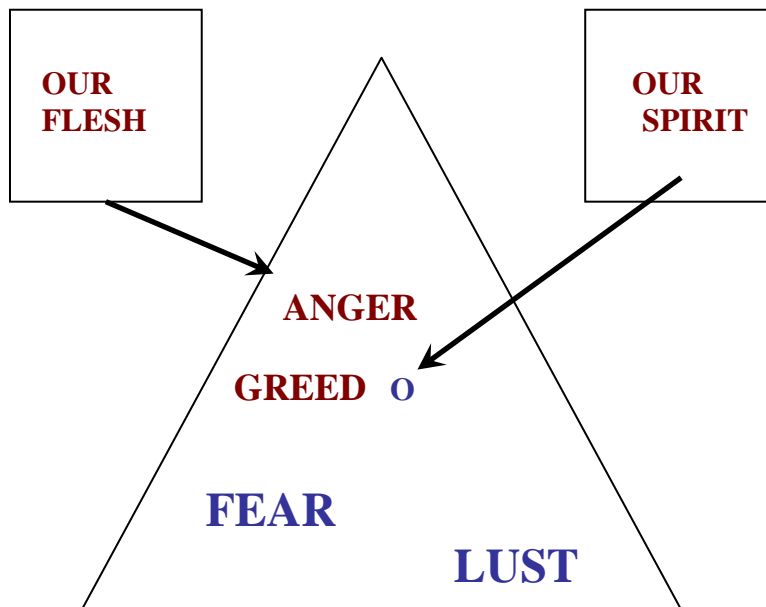
Now let me read a portion of that again. It does not say, "Do not be conformed to this world, but transform your mind!" It does not say that. It says, "*...be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*"

This is something in which we try to get involved. We want to be good Christians; we want to be good disciples, therefore we want to transform our minds. However, the problem is this: We are temporal beings, therefore we are capable of only temporary accomplishments. We may temporarily transform our mind, but the old man keeps coming back up. Our impulsive reactions, our

repulsive responses take over, and they reveal our mind. So, the transforming of our minds must take place in a different way.

Now, I am going to give you another scripture here, let us turn to John 3. This is another scripture where we try to get involved ourselves. We want to be such good Christians and we want to be such good disciples, that we feel like we have to do something. We do not understand the difference between "being" and doing. We have to **be with** Christ, and allow **Him** to do.

Now the verse I want you to look at in John 3 is Verse 30. **It says, "He must increase, but I must decrease." We do not read that right. We read that this way, "I must decrease in order for Him to have room to increase." However, in examining this scripture, we see that the increase comes before the decrease. Look at it, doesn't the increase come before the decrease? As Jesus increases, we decrease. It is a natural outcome of our relationship.**



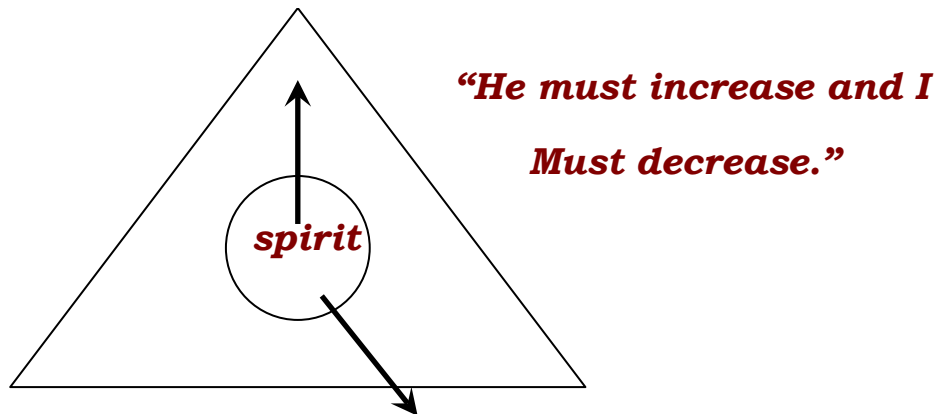
Now, let me show you something here on the board. This is us. This is our flesh. This is our spirit. And that spirit has the Adamic nature, and that gives us anger and fear, and lust, greed. And then we accept the Lord and He does a spiritual transplant. He gives us the Spirit of Christ. But we are still flesh. We have the Spirit of Christ, but we are still flesh. And we read the scripture, "He must increase and we must decrease" and so we try to decrease by focusing on our anger and our fear, and our greed and our lust—but what did we just establish? What we focus on, we feed!

I am focusing on my anger because I want to get rid of my anger, and so I get all kinds of opportunities to be angry. I spend my time wrestling

with my anger, and my eyes are on myself rather than on Jesus Christ. My focus is in the wrong place.

So what do we do? What we focus on we feed, so let us focus on Jesus Christ! What we focus on increases. And what happens to the anger. What happens to the lust? What happens to the greed? The spirit increases, the flesh decreases, and Jesus has just shown us painless crucifixion of the flesh.

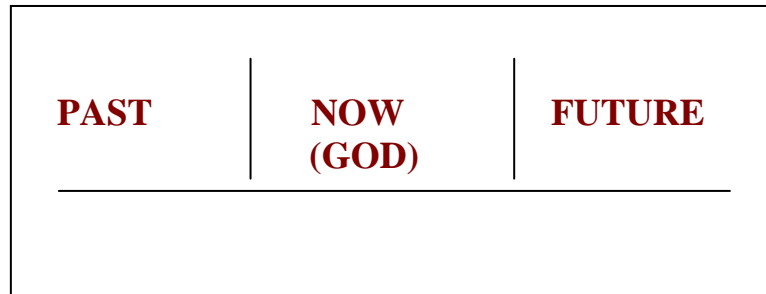
But, the key is in the focus. It is for us such an incredible waste of time to be confronting a problem and dealing with a problem because it is a problem. The worst way in the world to become a better person is to try to become a better person. This is because when we do this, we are wrestling with ourselves and we are temporal, so we only accomplish temporary things.



Do you want to be a good husband? Do you want to be a good wife? Focus upon Jesus Christ. He will make you a good husband, He will make you a good wife. Do you want to be a good parent? Focus on Jesus Christ, He will make you a good parent.

Everything! I am convinced that everything in our lives as Christians should come out of our relationship with Jesus Christ. And that is a natural outcome. We do not have to renew our minds. The more we focus on Jesus Christ, the more our minds are renewed. The more we focus on Jesus Christ, the more we are transformed. The more we focus on Jesus Christ, the more we decrease. Does that make sense?

Now, focus requires practice. And practice requires discipline. And discipline requires focus! So, it is a circle! But, can you see how important focus is?



Now, let me show you something else. We have these three things: We have the **now**, which is where God is. We have the **past**, and we have the **future**. One of our problems is that our focus is either on the past or the future. But, that is not where God lives. God lives in eternity, doesn't He? Well, I do not know if God lives in eternity, but He created all things and so He created eternity too. And we know for sure that He is not influenced by time, and He is not interested in our past. Oh, He can draw from our past, and use it to His benefit, to His glory, but He does not want us to lament about our past. He has forgiven us our past. The slate is wiped clean, so we need to stay out of it. We need to get out of the past.

We get filled with guilt, and shame and—Baloney! Who do you think takes us into the past? The enemy takes us into the past. Moreover, if he is not successful there, he takes us over here in the other direction and starts us agonizing about the future. "Oh, my goodness, what will happen here?" "What will happen there?" "What if? What if?"

Who takes us there? The enemy! **God is in the NOW**. He is in the "now." There is no time in eternity. Everything is "Now" in eternity. So, when we cry out, "God!" we touch eternity. Right in the now! Because He does not hide behind some pillar in the temple of heaven, or something like that. When we cry out to God, we reach God! But the only place we can reach God is in the now. God no longer lives in the past. God does not live in the future. The past and the future mean nothing to Him.

"Now" is what is terribly important to us. However, we are funny creatures. We can be eating a great big Thanksgiving dinner, and be thinking about the pumpkin pie we are going to have after dinner! We will do anything in the world to stay out of the now!

You know, it is so important for us to stay in the present. The present is really all we have. We have so many young men go through the program here at

this camp. We have about sixty men in the program right now. Two years ago, we had five men leave. All five were in their twenties, and none of the five lived six months after leaving here. For some reason or another, their lives are gone. They refused to live in the now, with God. They refused to make the most of the program here. They were thinking about the future, out there.

But, you know, we are just as guilty. You know, fortunately we are not addicted to drugs and alcohol, but we still want to know what is going to happen next. **Disciples are to walk with uncertainty, without insecurity. You see, we want to know what is around the next corner. But, God is saying, "Do you trust Me?"**

You know, it is a funny thing, but when I first got this thing on my neck, I prayed about it, and the only thing God said about it is, "Do you trust Me?" I will not go through all the details with you, but my initial response was, "Of course, God. I trust You." But, then, the reality moved from my head to my heart, and I realized that He was asking me, "Do you trust me with your life?" And that is a whole different cup of tea! You know, I can vocalize, "I trust You; Lord, I trust You, Lord; I trust You, Lord," but it is a real difference when we are talking about life and death.

So, I have to walk with uncertainty without insecurity! You see a man standing before you who is doing that right now. I have had all kinds of prophecy. People have had visions, all of them dealing with a healing. I hope that they are right, but I am trusting the Lord about it.

While I was writing this book, "Now," my wife, who prepares the book for the printers, kept calling it, "Hope." We could not figure out why she always called it "Hope." Then this thing happened to my neck, and the Lord laid it on my heart that I needed to write something about hope. That was when I discovered that I knew absolutely nothing about hope, and I realized that we treat hope superficially: "I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow, I want to wash the car."

However, in order to write about hope, I had to do a little research, and I was surprised to discover that God is the "*God of hope*" (Romans 15:13), and He is the source of hope. Then a very familiar verse came to my mind, and God showed me something in it. Hebrews 11:1, "*Faith is the substance of things hoped for....*" Do you know what God showed me? If faith is the substance of things hoped for, then hope precedes faith. God is the God of hope, therefore God plants hopes in our hearts. He is the God of faith. (He is the God of everything, of course.)

He also showed me something about intercessory prayer. Now, I know that all of you are interceding for somebody in your life, and this is what God showed me about intercessory prayer. When we intercede for someone, we activate the

power of God in that person. If that were not so, there would not be any reason to pray.

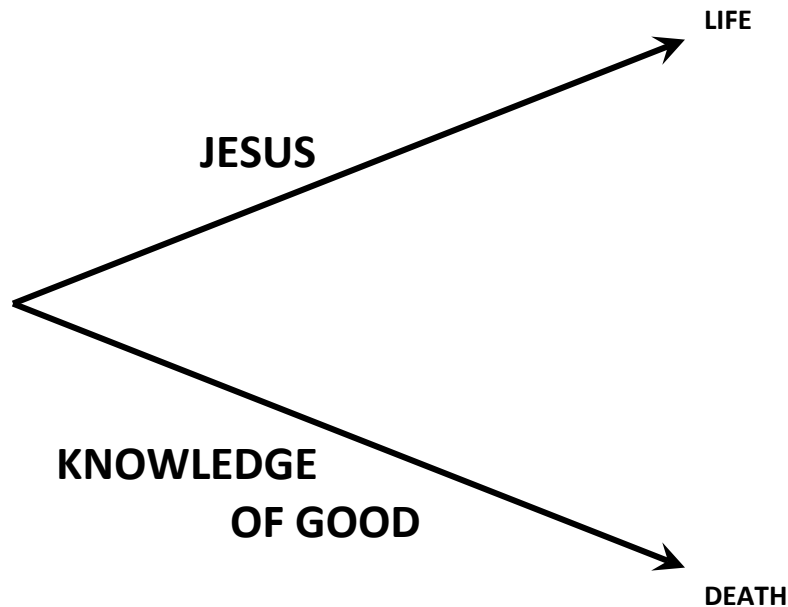
All right. What power do we activate then in that person? We activate the power of hope. We activate the power of faith. We activate whatever power is necessary for that person, and very often, the person we are interceding for is not in a position to pray with strong faith about himself or herself. Therefore, we are interceding for them, and fulfilling their need. It is just like the four men who lowered the infirm man down through the roof. They were interceding for that man. Jesus honored the faith of the intercessors.

So, He showed me how incredibly important intercessory prayer is. So, do not ever think that your prayer does not amount to anything. It is extremely important! Let me tell you something else about prayer. (Now, you may have a little problem with this, and you may have to chew on this a little bit; but that is okay.) There is no time limit on prayer. Prayer can be retroactive. God sees the end from the beginning. Right? So, when He knows today that you are going to pray tomorrow for that person, He will honor tomorrow's prayer today! He is not limited by time. It is we who are limited by time. Let us not limit God!

I am going to show you one more thing (on the blackboard). Remember from our diagram that we just made, that this place (the past) belongs to Satan, and this (the future) belongs to Satan. And this (the now) belongs to God, right here.

Now, at this point (new diagram) in our lives, we made a choice. We decided to focus upon Jesus Christ. That is this upper line here.

There is another line, this lower line, that we could have taken. You know, there are a lot of people headed that way. One of the worst things that we have gotten from the garden was the knowledge of good. Remember, in the Garden of Eden, we got the knowledge of good and evil. And, I want to tell you, the knowledge of good can keep you away from God just as much as the knowledge of evil.



Now, the enemy would have us think that we are on this [lower] line, trying to reach this [upper] line, and to have us be failing because we keep trying to do good...until finally we just give up. There are a lot of Christians that feel that way. But the truth is, we are on this upper line and we are not perfect, therefore we make a few stumbles. But, in 1 John 1:9, it says, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" All right, so we fall into a little bit of sin here, through disobedience or something, we confess our sins, and He says, "Okay, let's get back on the line. Let's keep going." Okay?

We are not on this lower line...this is where the enemy wants us to think we are. We are not! The enemy is a liar.

...The Lord just told me, I have given you enough. So, when He stops, I think I had better stop too. I am in deep trouble if I do not.

It has been my pleasure. You are a great group of people, and it is just wonderful to stand up here and talk to you and share with you. I have enjoyed it and I invite you to enjoy the rest of the week. I love you and God bless you!

