

Focused Living In A Frantic World

Hebrews 11 & Hebrews 12:1-2

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Every December as we turn the calendar page from one year to the next, there has been a tradition in our news media to broadcast or publish year-end reviews, spotlighting what has happened and projecting what will come.

In many ways, Hebrews 11 is the Bible in review. We find the best-known people of the Bible and their stories spotlighted to give us help and hope for the future.

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. And by faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made from the things that are visible...But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of **those who diligently seek Him**.*
—Hebrews 11:1-3, 6 (bold italics added for emphasis)

The defining hallmark of every Christian and true follower of Jesus Christ should be "...those who diligently seek Him." Today, we find people seeking for all kinds of things in life: pleasure, money, fame. The list could go on and on. But the Christian is a *God-seeker*. Literally, the Christian keeps his or her focus on God in order to stay the course.

Focus is to life what a laser-beam is to light; it is concentrated energy for maximum effectiveness. What is your life-focus? What focus is needed to help you achieve the ultimate goal of being a seeker after God?

As we study Hebrews 11, there are five words I feel we need to consider if we are to keep our lives in F-O-C-U-S.

Faith

Faith, the Bible says without faith it is impossible to please God. Without faith I cannot please God. Therefore if I'm going to live a life that is God pleasing and God seeking then it has to start where God calls me to start and that is at the place of faith. Of course...course the first step of faith is believing His Son our Savior Jesus Christ:

[Act 16:31]

... "Believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ that you may be saved...."

And it all starts with putting our faith and trust in Him. But faith is also the operational system of the Christian life and all of the Christian life is lived and lived out day in and day out by faith. Faith is dependence upon God, His character, His nature and His promise as revealed in His Word. Now many of us fo...focus our lives on frustrations, on the future, on finances, sometimes on our fatigue, but what is needed in life is a life that is

focused on faith and we live by faith. Faith that is dependent upon God's Word and His promise. Now you know the fact of life is that we all live as dependent beings, dependent creatures. Every one of us who are in this place this morning are sitting here under this massive roof, this massive structure that's above us, steel and concrete and all other sorts of building materials that weigh tremendous volumes of weight, but we're here underneath all of this knowing that if it were to fall it would be treacherous, it would be calamity, but we're under it because we believe that the right construction has gone into the building of this building and that it has been proven, but we do it as an act of faith. You're sitting in that pew this morning as an act of faith. When you walked in the door and you looked at the seat and you said I'm going to sit here. You looked at the construction of that pew, you believed that it would hold you up and you trusted yourself to that pew. When you drove on the parking lot this morning you drove on and you turned your car off because you believe when you go back and put your key in that that car's gonna start again. Right? Anybody up for leavin your car here for the rest of the day? Probably not. You believe that your car is going to start again and as I started speaking a moment ago you believe that I somewhere have a watch or a clock that I'm watching that's going to get you out of here at some reasonable hour. [congregation laughter] And I can assure you that you will be able to see the Cowboy kick-off at 7:30 this evening. So don't worry about it. [more laughter] I say all that to say we're so dependent. We're dependent in every area of life, but we're dependent upon so many things other than God and His Word. The Bible says we as believers walk by faith and not by sight and yet we get so consumed in the sight living and in the sensory experience of this world that we forget that the greatest part of the dynamic of our entire being is the spiritual nature of our life that God has put in us and imprinted in us and God made us to live by faith, depending upon Him. And then He has given us His Word as the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen because it is in this book that we find out who God is and what God is like. Now you and I need faith because there are at least **3 THINGS THAT EVERY ONE OF US ARE GOING TO FACE IN THE NEW YEAR** that is to come, 3 things that I can promise you.

First, **NEW PROBLEMS**, yep, you close the door on 2005 and some old problems are gone, but let me just be the first to tell you there are some new problems coming in 2006. And when you face the new problems that are ahead in 2006 you're going to need to face those problems with faith. Not only are you going to face some new problems in your life...

You're going to feel some **NEW PRESSURES** in your life. New pressures, I often feel pressures when I fly. I get on an airplane I never know when exactly it's gonna occur, sometimes it's in a takeoff, sometimes it's in a landing, but all the sudden I start feeling something in my head, a pressure that's very disconcerting and uncomfortable an...an agitation and maybe some of you have had that in flying, but I can assure you, you will have it in living. It may be in a relationship, it may be in your finances, it may be in some aspect of your emotions, but I can tell you that a part of life is that you're going to feel and face some new pressures in life and when life begins to build up on you the key release is faith.

And then there're gonna be some **NEW POSSIBILITIES**. It's not all gonna be bad. There're gonna be some great things ahead, there're gonna be some incredible new horizons of life for you and for me, but the secret to embracing those new horizons of life is not simply living out our best touch, but stepping forward by faith and putting our confidence in God and in His Word. You say well how do I grow in faith? How can I build my faith? You know for so many people faith is nothing more than wishful thinking. You hear people talk about faith all the time, it's like something you have to muster up, it's like blowin up a balloon, it's like whoo...who...who...who...who I'm gonna have more faith, I'm gonna have more faith whoo...who, but you see faith doesn't build that way, faith is stepping out based on evidence, it's dependence based on the evidence that God has given to us. It's acting on that evidence and faith is believing the Word of God. So what's the secret to growing your faith? Romans 10:17 tells us:

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

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You want your faith to grow? You wanna be a man or woman of faith? You have to take this Book at face value. You have to believe God. You have to take His instructions, His promises, His insights, His wisdom, His commandments and you begin to make them your own and you will begin to live out faith in life. The men and women listed in Hebrews 11 were not different, they were not super heroes of the Christian faith, they were ordinary people just like you and me, but whose lives became extraordinary because they lived by faith and faith will transform your life and if you will feed your faith through the Word of God you will starve your doubts to death. Faith! The second key word for us from this passage today is the word...

Obedience

Obedience, Hebrews 11 in verse 8 says:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

I love that. The Bible tells us at the end of the verse that there was a lot that Abraham didn't understand about what God wanted him to do. But it tells us at the beginning of the verse that He obeyed God. He took God at His word and his faith stepped into action and obedience was the expression of his faith and even though he didn't know where he was going or what the outcome would be, Abraham was willing to take a step of faith and that faith was evidence in obedience. Obedience is simply doing what we know that we should do. Many of us spend our lives wondering and wandering. How can I know the will of God? What should I do? I'm just not sure. Well, can I tell you that the simplest thing to do is let's put aside all the things that you don't know about and let's focus on some of the things that you do know about, because as a Christian there are some things that we can be very clear and very specific about as to God's plan and purpose for us. The key to growth in your life and focus in your life is do what you know to do. Jack Nicklaus the famed golfer once gave an instruction and in giving instructions this is what he said:

"Focus on remedies, not faults."

Now that's brilliant. If you wanna improve your golf game...

"Focus on remedies and not faults."

Focus on positive things that you can do. Well, can I say that's great advice for a Christian? Focus on the remedies, focus on positive obedience in your life to God, focus on obedience to God in the area of prayer, praying without ceasing, learning what it means day in and day out to acknowledge your dependence upon God and your need for Him in life. Focus on giving. We talked about that earlier today doing the time of the offering, but that's not simply something that the church has come up with as a fund raising campaign, it's the very principle of the Word of God that the first tenth of everything I receive I am to give back to the Lord in recognition that He owns everything, but that He has provided everything that I need and that I have and I'm going to give to Him believing that if I give to God I can do more with 90% and God as a partner than I can with 100% by myself. And when I begin to take God at His word and obey Him it's amazing what He does with my finances. Oh I'm not talkin about driving fancy cars and wearin the nicest cloths, I'm talking about how amazing it is that God supplies all of your needs according to His riches in glory and God does things that you never thought He could do in your life.

How bout gratitude, the Bible says: [1 Thessalonians 5:18]

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

I don't have to wonder about that. God wants me to have a grateful spirit, it's easy for me, easy for you to be a person who finds reasons to complain, to grip, to grumble, but one of the things that the Bible tells us is that God wants us to have an attitude of gratitude. It's true in so many areas of life and therefore the key to focus in life and in faith is focusing on areas of known obedience.

A number of years ago there was a man, a member of a church, his pastor was Philips Brooks. Philips Brooks is a famed preacher, a wonderful preacher of yesteryear and this member of his church went to him and said, "Pastor Brooks" he said, "I'm so excited" he said, "I am going to make a trip to the Holy Land" and he said, "When I get to the Holy Land I'm going to go to Mount Sinai and I'm going to climb to the top, I'm going to take my Bible, I'm going to open it and out loud I am going to read The Ten Commandments." Well, the pastor just sort of looked at him. He said, "What do you think?" He said, "Well, you know" he said a... he said, "That's fine" he said, "But I can think of something better than that." He said, "Really?" He said, "Pastor tell me what is it?" He said, "You could save a lot of money and a lot of energy if you'd just stay home and obey The Ten Commandments." [congregation laughter] Now let's think about it for just a moment. Isn't it true that the majority of all of our New Year's resolutions are not sudden discoveries of something we've never done before in life? But by in large most of our New Year's resolutions are resolved to go back and do the things we know we oughta be doing anyway? Isn't that what most of us do at New Years? I need to loose some weight, I need to eat better, I need to get some exercise, I need to read more, I need to do this, I need to not do that? So much of what we do in our resolution is nothing more than bringing fundamental practices back into play where indulgences have taken their place. Instead of discipline I've given myself indulgence and now I know I need to get back to discipline and therefore obedience is coming to the place where I say I'm going to do before God what I know I should do and I'm gonna let Him take care of the results.

As a teenager, I remember my pastor making this statement, so often I would think how can I know the will of God, how can I do the will of God? But I remember this statement, I wrote it in my Bible, never forgotten it.

[Dr. Adrian Rogers]

"The way to know and do the will of God in your life is to do the will of God in the next 15 minutes."

"The way to know and do the will of God in your life is to do the will of God in the next 15 minutes."

I don't know where I'm gonna be a year from now, 15 months from now, 15 years from now, I don't know where I'm goin, but what I do know is I can do what's immediately before me to do the will of God and so the second key word is obedience. The third word is...

Character

Character, as you look at Hebrews 11 you find that these were lives that were proven in character through the experiences that forged and lived out, fleshed out their faith.

Now I know that many are going to be resolved in this New Year to some bodybuilding. In fact let me just take a survey. How many of you are going to do something about your body this year? How many of you all...that's part of what you're doin, let's put your hands up, let's see? Accountability, that's good, a lot of bodybuilding. Now you might just wanna look at the person next to you and say you're not gonna know me in 6 months. [congregation laughter] I'm gonna be such a lean mean, you know? You see a lot of us are into bodybuilding, we're gonna do something to build the body and that's a good thing, don't get me wrong. But, can I tell you that the number one aim that God has in your life is character building and just as it is true of bodybuilding, that muscles are built through the development and overcoming resistance, so it is that it is the times of resistance

and adversity that build our character and prove our faith. God wants to build character in you. God wants to build character in me. You read the life of Moses, you talk about a man whose character was forged on the anvil of affliction and difficulty, it was Moses. But it was through those adversities and through those hardships and through that resistance that he began to take on the character of a man of God.

My wife gave me a wonder quote book for Christmas it's called *Famous Old Dead Guys* and in it Samuel Johnson said this:

"Adversity has ever been considered the stake in which a man most easily becomes acquainted with himself."

Well there are gonna be some things this year that are going to take you to the end of who you are and what you are. You're gonna find out some things about yourself. You're gonna find out some things about your faith and I wanna really challenge you to pray that this year as you face challenges, because none of us can choose those, none of us really knows when they're coming or how they're coming, but when you do make the one choice you can make and that is God use us to build the character of Christ.

Not long ago I read that Vicky Medvick, a professor at Northwestern University studied Olympic Medalists and she discovered interestingly enough that bronze metalists were always much happier than silver metalists. And do you know why? Because silver metalists always focused on the fact that they were so close to winning the gold that they were never satisfied with the silver. But bronze metalists realized that they came so close to not even getting a metal, that they were just thrilled that they left with a metal. [congregation laughter] You know there's something we can learn about that and that is that you can't always choose the place that you end up in life, but what you can understand is that if your life is not gold plated and if your life doesn't always carry the stem of a sil...silver spoon that the bronze that is forged in you through the hardship and the adversity can be the very character that God wants to build in you ~~to make Him~~...to make you His man, His woman, His person. Character, God works to build character in you and character in me and He uses the hardships of life to bring the character of Christ in us. U is...

Usefulness Usefulness, I believe that something that is wonderful and very clear about every person in this chapter, Hebrews 11, is that they were men and women who were useful to God.

They had chosen a heart of usefulness. God here I am, I surrender myself to You. Lord I belong to You and Lord I want You to use me. And I have to be honest when I look at my life, too often and too many times the defining word of my life has been busyness. It's so easy for me to just be busy, there's so many things to do in life, so many things to occupy and preoccupy my life and if I'm not careful the hallmark of life can simply be busyness. But something that I observe in the lives of these men and women and something that I long to see in my life is that my life would not be given to busyness but to usefulness to God for His purpose, for His plan, for His glory. The Bible tells us in Hebrews 11:39 that:

...these all obtained a good testimony of faith,...

And that good testimony of faith came from the fact that they gave themselves fully and wholeheartedly to the will and to the work of God. I believe there's some ways that God wants to make your life useful for His glory, but you must be willing to be available to Him. Usefulness, and then you get to the end of Hebrews 11 and you have to step right in to Hebrews 12, there really is no

Separation But we have a chapter separation, the message doesn't separate, because now we come to the final, the sum, the application of it all because here the writer says:

Therefore we also,...

Hebrews 12:1:

...since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Listen to this!

² *...looking unto Jesus,...*

Laying aside everything else, that everything that would hinder, that would encumber, that would somehow inhibit my ability to fulfill my goal would be put away, that my focus may be on one and one thing looking unto Jesus, laying aside the weights. The idea here is the idea of separation, separation. It's not so much that we focus all of our attention on what we need to separate from. Certainly there's some things we need to separate from, but it's not being consumed that I need to live my life, oh I gotta be away from that, oh I gotta be away from this and oh I gotta stay away from that. It's that I need to be so separated to that one magnificent obsession in my heart, that one passion in my life, that it beyond everything else just causes me to stretch out and step away from everybody and everything else in the race that I run the race looking unto Jesus. Running the race that is set before you. All of these have run their race and their path was different than my path and than your path, but as you step onto the path that is set before you for 2006, my prayer for you, my passion for you today is that you will run the race that is set before you looking unto Jesus and that this would be your focus and my focus in life. What does it mean to live focused? It means this, faith, obedience, character, usefulness, separation and when these things are yours and these things are mine as we are following after Christ into a New Year then instead of living in the blur of life as it so often can become we begin to live life focused, looking unto Jesus and I know of no greater way for us to put our eyes on Jesus than to gather at the table and to come and to remember what Christ has done for us. It was on a night of passage, a point of crossing over when Jesus would be stepping into His passion and soon out of this earth. He would die, He would be buried, He would rise again and ascend into Heaven. He would leave behind the promise that He was coming again one day for all of those who put their faith and trust in Him and it was on that night of transition and passage that He gathered with His disciples and that He took a tradition, He made it a new act of devotion and a new expression of faith. So today we gather and we share these elements remembering what Christ has done and the hope of all that we have in the Lord Jesus.