

Where Do I Focus My Attention? (Sermon for October 18, 2009)

Text: Ecclesiastes 5:10-20

"A weak mind is like a microscope, which magnifies trifling things but cannot receive great ones." — Lord Chesterfield

The focus of your attention determines your life experiences. Where you put your attention, you put your energy. Where you put your attention, you put your consciousness. You draw into your life the things to which you give your attention, whether you want them or not. You seed the thing or idea that has your attention. That seed grows into the experiences of everyday life. If you have put your attention mainly on happy things, you will lead a mostly happy life; if you have put your attention mainly on unhappy things, you will lead a mostly unhappy life.

Light and Dark; Positive and Negative

There is a light side and a dark side in every part of life. Or you might say that everything has both a positive and a negative side or aspect. Without the light and the dark (or positive and negative), life could not exist as you know it, just as you could not see images in a photograph without light and dark qualities. It is your personal choice whether you focus on either the positive or the negative. You can choose to see and expand the darkness or the lightness of each situation, each relationship, each moment. You can choose to focus on the negative or the positive in each person — both exist.

You can choose to illuminate the bad or the good in every situation. It is an individual choice, constantly evoked by your focus of attention. A little flaw becomes a big one as you talk about it. The flaw gains greater momentum with each telling, drawing to you others who are fascinated by the flaw. As the fascination grows, you see the same or similar flaws in others. So, too, a good point becomes an enormous asset as you focus on it and give it attention through your observations, thoughts, and conversations.

Attention: A Matter of Choice

Every decision is a choice. Where you put your attention constantly changes and creates your life. Your attention steers your path and directs your thoughts.

Sometimes it appears that you do not have a choice about where you place your attention, but that is because of habit or familiarity. Sometimes you need a reminder. I remind you and encourage you to remind yourself and others: "you have a choice." Choose to place your attention on what you want. Give your attention to what you appreciate. Fill your thoughts with what you want to expand. View your world through the same eyes of the person you want to be. (Your Focus of Attention is Your Key to Happiness By Jeanie Marshall)

Focusing our attention on God's Word and His will for our lives is our subject today. There are many things to focus our attention on. The book of Ecclesiastes shows a few of them. In the First Lesson for today the writer of Ecclesiastes focuses on wealth. Often a person is focused on money, making money and lots of it. People are drawn to the "get rich" themes. Game shows like "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" or "Deal or No Deal" excite people to focus on riches. Casinos certainly draw people to try and make it rich quick.

But that's not the only enticements. People focus their attention on the stock market, investments, work, work, and more work in order to get a big "nest-egg" they can draw from. Listen to the words from this text again.

¹⁰ Whoever loves money never has money enough;
whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.
This too is meaningless.

¹¹ As goods increase,
so do those who consume them.
And what benefit are they to the owner
except to feast his eyes on them?

¹² The sleep of a laborer is sweet,
whether he eats little or much,
but the abundance of a rich man
permits him no sleep.

¹³ I have seen a grievous evil under the sun:
wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner,

- ¹⁴ or wealth lost through some misfortune,
so that when he has a son
there is nothing left for him.
- ¹⁵ Naked a man comes from his mother's womb,
and as he comes, so he departs.
He takes nothing from his labor
that he can carry in his hand.
- ¹⁶ This too is a grievous evil:
As a man comes, so he departs,
and what does he gain,
since he toils for the wind?
- ¹⁷ All his days he eats in darkness,
with great frustration, affliction and anger.

Where is the focus of attention? It's on wealth. Verse 15 is clear about the ultimate outcome of life. Verse 17 is his reward.

From Mark 10, the Gospel lesson for today, we read about a rich man who was in search of eternal life. Jesus reflects on how hard it often is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. The riches are a distraction and hard to share if one is too attached to them. The disciples' incredulity is that if even the rich cannot be saved, who can? But the verdict is that even the rich, yet not only the rich, will find it impossible to save themselves – but with God all things are possible.

Many people living in the Bible lands at the time when the Gospels were written, erroneously believed that all wealth was a blessing from GOD. If one was poor, then the people believed that he must surely be cursed by GOD, but if one was rich he must surely be blessed by GOD. This is why the disciples "*were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?*" (Mark 10:26). They thought that if the rich found it difficult to enter the Kingdom of GOD, what chance did the rest of them have? Much of Jesus' teaching endeavored to correct the false assumption that wealth is always a blessing from GOD. The truth is more the other way. Usually the pursuit of wealth insulates us from the workings of GOD in our lives. It can choke the word sown in our hearts and rob us of eternal treasures our heavenly Father desires for us to obtain. Hence, it is difficult (not impossible) for a rich man to

enter the Kingdom of GOD. Many stumble at this and are sad and go away grieved, having found no answer that pleases them. A few however are willing to set aside secondary pursuits and seek with all their heart to know HIM who knew them "before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4).

Now for the Good News! The writer of Ecclesiastes continues - ¹⁸ Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him—for this is his lot. ¹⁹ Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God. ²⁰ He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.

The Good News of the Gospel is that God makes it possible for salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It seems impossible that a person can be saved by this action from God. However, with God all things are possible. Ephesians 2:8-9 reads – ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.

This is what God desires for you to focus your attention on every day. With your eyes focused on Jesus, you can enjoy your family, your work, your education, your entertainment, your LIFE. They are gifts from God to enjoy!

Thanks be to God for what He has done! Amen.