



Keep Your Mind on This

Do You Struggle to Focus?

In college I took several chemistry classes, and I loved the labs. Generally our experiments involved calculating the exact ratio of chemicals needed to create a chemical reaction. We used a titration tube filled with one solution and drop by drop added it to a second solution in a beaker. When I got to the point where I was pretty certain the reaction was about to occur, I would use a special technique of cutting the drops, making them smaller so I could get a more precise measure of the exact ratios. Precision was imperative to getting a good grade. More than the chemistry involved, I learned from these experiments the value of getting it right, of being accurate and paying attention to details. Just this past week I noticed a strange sound coming from the engine of my car. It is not surprising that something might be going wrong with it given its age, but I knew I needed to have this checked so I brought it to the mechanic. It turned out that I only had a quart of oil still in the engine and if I had driven the car one more week like that I would have ruined the engine. Like a caring physician or a dentist, my mechanic warned me about the dangers of not being careful, of not regularly checking the oil levels in my car. It was a relief not to have to replace the engine or get rid of the car, but it was also a reminder that it matters what we do and how we do it because if we aren't careful, the consequences of our carelessness can be severe.

James gives us a thoughtful reminder that there is a critical component to our lives that many of us overlook and it is how we think. You might realize that how you think impacts you but perhaps you haven't considered this. **Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.** (James 5: 13-15 NIV) There are three components to this, each combining with the others to provide a unifying way of thinking. The first is simply this. If you are going through a rough time, pray. The verb translated "in trouble" speaks of you suffering evil or affliction, being vexed by what you face or dejected. If you haven't faced a tough time of it, you will. That is not pessimism, it is simply truth. I have a friend battling rheumatoid arthritis and cancer. Another is having a tough time paying his bills. I know of someone who has a gallstone but the hospital where he lives won't operate unless it becomes life-threatening. Another friend has a husband who has been cheating on her and someone else is unemployed and struggling to provide for his family. Trouble is everywhere and universally felt. James insists, even commands that when we face tough things, even if others might not think it is so bad, we must immediately begin to pray.

Job faced far worse than nearly any of us ever will and he set the standard for how we are to react. Job had good friends who tried to help him sort it out but unfortunately they just made it worse for Job. Job's longing was to meet with the LORD; he knew that was the step he needed to take. **But I desire to speak to the Almighty and to argue my case with God.** (Job 13: 3 NIV) I know of a young mom who's newborn has a severe medical condition and she is understandably upset. We all face something rough, and it does not matter how what we have come against compares to the severity of what someone else faces, the rule is the same. Go to Christ. Bring your problem to Him immediately. How He responds to you will be different

from how He does me. It may be through a Bible verse you read. It could be by someone God sends you. It might be an expert you come upon. God will bring you help; He will calm your frayed nerves. The Lord will guide you through the trouble and although it might not go away immediately, turn to God for help and He will take you through it.

Second, James says that when things are going well and you are happy, sing songs of praise. David famously led a procession of Jews through the streets of Jerusalem when he happily brought back the Ark of the Covenant to its rightful place in the Tabernacle. **David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the Lord with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets.** (2 Samuel 6: 14-15 NIV) In the West, our Christian thinking rarely takes in celebration. We are happy and maybe even excited, but rarely do we give a joyful shout to God when something goes well. We are mostly too embarrassed to do it. Yet football fans will jump up and fist pump when their team scores the go ahead touchdown and teens scream in ecstasy when their favorite K-Pop band hits the stage. We pick and choose our moments of celebration, but James says we need to choose more often to celebrate God when we are happy. It is a great way to make your happiness grow and filter into parts of you where it can't go if you don't bring it to God. Why just have temporary emotional happiness when you can enjoy long lasting spiritual happiness if you bring God into it? Try it. Sing a song of praise when you feel good about something. Say an "Amen" or a "Praise the Lord". When you bring your happiness to God, it gets transformed into supernatural happiness.

The third point James makes is that when you are sick, you are to summon the church leaders and have them pray for your recovery and anoint you with oil. In non-charismatic churches, this is rarely done. It is strange that it has been neglected but let's take a look at the command. What is translated "sick" is literally weak, infirm, sick, or even weak in faith. That means if you just don't feel good or you are struggling with your confidence in God, you are to get prayer support from the leaders of the church. I've pondered this quite a bit and it seems to me there is a nearly universal aspect to illness and severe setbacks. We start to lose hope. Our faith weakens. Probably you have experienced this. It may be tough for you to believe in God when you are hurting, when you are in a crisis. That is when you need support the most. Someone who still has faith in Christ to answer prayer. Someone who has hope in God to see you through it. An elder or two can keep you going when you want to quit, build your faith in God and help you reset your hope. When I was at a pastor's conference several years ago, there was a time of prayer and anyone who had a request would come down front and present it to the crowd of pastors and their wives. Then we all prayed for the requests. At the conclusion, I came down and found a couple who had asked for prayer to be able to conceive. They had been trying for four years without success. My wife and I had spent eight years trying to have a baby and it was only after our church laid hands on us and prayed over us that we started having children. I told the couple our story and offered to pray for them. With tears rolling down their cheeks, they happily accepted. A small group of us placed our hands on the couple and I prayed for them to have children. Afterward I gave them my number so they could call me when they found out they were pregnant. Two months later I got a call from them. I was the first person, after their parents, to be told by the couple that they just got the happy news they were indeed pregnant.

What do all three of these commands have in common. Think differently. Rather than just going off to get things done, give God some time to guide you. Think about Him in every circumstance. More than that, constantly align with Him, think with Him. A valuable way to see prayer is simply thinking with God. It is putting your mind with Christ and inviting Him to join you there. Suddenly, you are no longer on your own but it is God and you processing everything together. His insight becomes yours, His guidance yours, His intervention in what you are going through changing supernaturally events where you are engaged. Why become Christian at all if you aren't going to have Him with you; have Him working in you, perfecting your thinking and your approach to every part of your life? This three-fold command of God is simple. Make your thinking supernatural, immersing it in God so that He takes you to heavenly realms of doing, thinking, and experiencing all that is before you.