

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA
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Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal with the subject of focus. You can see many things at the same time, but you can only focus on one thing at a time. Look at your watch, for example. On the face of my watch I can read many words - Timex, date, time, day of the week, set, start, stop, mode, split/reset, water resistant, etc. I cannot read all these words at the same time, however, I must focus on only one at a time. Your success in life depends upon your ability to focus. Paul understood this and wrote: **“But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”, (Phil 3:13-14)**

Perhaps you have heard the old proverb: “He who chases two rabbits catches neither”. This is true. The hunter must have focus in order to be successful. For a bird in flight there is safety in numbers. While a hawk can easily focus on a single victim, hundreds of victims can be distracting. This simple fact is used by the military to protect planes from predator missiles. When an airplane is under attack it can drop hundreds of targets called “chaff”. These many targets can often distract the focus of a missile and save the airplane. The lack of focus also affects those driving cars. In 2011 23% of all automobile wrecks involved cell phones (That's 1.3 million crashes). Distractions can be deadly when you are driving. The lack of focus also affects athletes. At the recent Olympics (2016), Australian swimmer Emily Seebohm was a heavy favorite to win the gold in the 100-meter backstroke. She didn't! She later explained that she “messed up” because she stayed up too long the night before responding to messages of encouragement on Twitter and Facebook. Even minor distractions can sometimes dilute our effectiveness. Success and focus go together!

The spiritual application of this principle should be obvious. Paul wanted to win the race of life, and he did by focusing on only one thing.. He successfully finished the race, kept the faith, and has now received a crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:6 - 8). This crown, he explains, was not just for him, but also for “all who have longed for His appearing”. Paul's focus was to please Christ and that “one thing” was the driving force of his life. That “one thing” should also be the focus of every life.

First, Paul forgot what was behind. Some of the things “behind” were negative, and some were positive. He forgot them both. The man looking back over his shoulder cannot plow a straight furrow (Lk. 9:62). At Lystra, for example, Paul was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19). Imagine how distracting this memory would be if he thought about it every time he stood up to preach. That's why he forgot it. At Ephesus, by contrast, Paul had such success that in only two years everybody in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:10). He forgot this too! Success demands that we focus on today's race, not yesterday's victory or defeat.

The Greek word “ekteino” means to stretch out. When Jesus met a man with a withered hand, He commanded him “stretch out your hand” (Mk. 3:5). The word translated in our text as “straining toward” is “epekteino” which is an intensive form of “ekteino”. Paul was not just

“stretching out”, he was “straining”. Remember! The Christian life is not a “stroll” it is a race!

Matthew tells us of a man who wanted to follow Jesus, but “first” wanted to go and bury his father (Matt. 8:21). While it is generally assumed that the man’s father was still living, the need for focusing on the correct priority is crystal clear. We are to seek “first” His Kingdom and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33). It is a mistake to assume that putting Christ “first”, however, requires us to neglect our families. Exactly the reverse is true. **“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (1 Tim 5:8)** The point is that when we focus on the goal of pleasing Christ, whatever we do in word or deed becomes an act of worship unto the Lord (Col. 3:17). Even what we eat, for example, should be done “unto the Lord” (Rom. 14:6).

Paradoxically, this “slavery” to Christ actually produces freedom. Christ came to “proclaim freedom for the prisoners” (Lk. 4:18). It is a “glorious freedom” (Rom. 8:21) for “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17). “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Gal. 5:1), “But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature” (Gal 5:13)

If pleasing Christ is the one and only thing you do in this life, you will never regret it!

Please take a few seconds and watch this video of a runner who lost his focus.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWa9iYYPYF4>

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce