

HOW CAN WE FOCUS ON WHAT WE CAN'T SEE?

As I gazed into the night sky, a thin, swirly set of cirrus clouds looking like white *Northern Lights* enveloped the full moon and sparkling stars. I thought about Psalm 19 that states the heavens are proudly displaying and declaring the glorious, majestic beauty of our God. I had a rare moment of absolute *peace* focusing on the Creator as I was surrounded and overwhelmed by the precious presence of God Almighty.

In the midst of all the craziness and ungodliness in the world I am often bombarded with, I thought about my favorite verse on which to meditate: *"God will keep you in perfect peace when your mind is focused on Him ..."* (My paraphrase of Isaiah 26:3). I suddenly realized one challenge for us is how hard it is to focus on something or Someone we can't even see! So much in this world is geared to distract us, capture our attention, and take it away from focusing on God (e.g., social media, technology, politics, etc.). How can we have *peace* in the midst of such a tumultuous, ungodly world? Paul encourages us to look at the eternal things that are unseen (II Cor. 4).

But how can we focus on One we cannot physically see? It's like trying to focus on ghosts, which I can't personally see, unlike Sam on the *CBS show, Ghosts. But I ain't 'fraid of no ghosts* because I think they are mostly friendly, like *Casper and Flower*. I recently saw a captcha that wanted to confirm I was not a robot. It wanted me to *check all the boxes with invisible ghosts!*

As I was experiencing that *peace* of God's presence, I realized it took me away from the appalling corruption taking place around the world and in our country by leaders and others who are not held accountable for the immoral, unethical, and illegal things they are doing and have done.

I have many dear Christian friends and family who have literally stopped watching any political news this year because it is so discouraging and distressing. If only there was something in the Bible about what to focus on! What's that you say, Paul? We should focus on whatever is true, good, pure, and noble (Phil. 4:8). But Paul, what if we are worried about all the corruption hidden by deceit and lies? You say we should not worry or be anxious about anything but instead pray about everything (not so we always get the outcome we want) but rather that the *peace of God* will keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

But Paul, how in the world can you focus on the good things when you persecuted and even *put Christians to death?* What's that you say? We must forget what is behind in the past and focus on the prize of the high calling of Jesus (Phil. 3:13-14). It seems Paul's goal was not to focus on making Rome better or making Israel great or looking to the future and hoping America would be great and godly. His focus was on Jesus' mission and the presence of God.

I confess it has been hard for me to keep focus on God lately. I believe God's Spirit within me has literally given me a *feeling of nausea* when I continually hear about so many sinful and hurtful things being done in our country this year to divine image-bearers who were lovingly created by God. Sadly, the motivation has often been so *the wealthy can become more wealthy* and powerful. I am reminded of Jesus' words that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter Heaven (Matt. 19:24). I am so thankful Meals on Wheels was not cut during my mom's last days on earth because they provided meals to her. I am SO thankful *my wife is now cancer-free* because back then there were not cuts on university cancer radiation treatment research.

So what are some practical ways to see the unseen?

- 1) Memorize scripture like Is. 26:3 and the Lord's Prayer . . . *Repeat, do not Rinse!*
- 2) Pray *"Thank/Praise the Lord"* (I Thess. 5:18) ... Repeat (no Rinsing yet), because even though all is not good, we understand that Romans 8:28-29 says that God works all things together for our good to make us more like Jesus, and He is the Master Chess Player to combat the evils of this world.

- 3) My namesake, *Brother Lawrence* (please don't tell anyone my birth certificate name is Lawrence) wrote one of the classics of Christian literature called *"The Practice of the Presence of God"*. I recommend reading a modern version of that book by Greg Boyd called *"Present Perfect"*.

Focus/meditate on the fact that God is right with you in your midst and He passionately loves you! We are to seek first the Kingdom of God above all the kingdoms (idols) of this world (money, jobs, social media, smart phones, government, country, etc.) and make Him our highest priority. Set our minds on the things above rather than the earthly things which are passing away.

4) Choose the correct object to have faith in ... which leads to my next subsection.

Semi-Coherent Ramblings Musing on Faith . . .

Faith in What???

The object of our faith is as important as the faith itself. If you have faith the Padres will win the World Series, you are probably putting faith in the wrong place. Is your faith in some outcome you want or is it in a sovereign God? Does your faith in God mean He will heal everyone or keep our loved ones from dying?

Some may say they have faith that God will “fix” our country because of this new administration. Does that mean God will solve every problem we face as a nation and will He now force everyone in the country to become a follower of Jesus Christ? Sometimes we may have faith that God will fix our country or fix our government or solve other problems ... but we want to tell Him *how* He should do it. Is our faith in the outcome we prefer/request OR in GOD Himself and what He knows is best?! Believing political fear-mongering can keep us from faith/trust in God, can make us fearful rather than experiencing the peace of God, and tends to selfishly direct our focus on protecting #1 (the 1st shall be last ~ Jesus) rather than unselfishly sharing the love of God by helping others.

If we want our country to look more Christian, our goal should be to genuinely love others so we earn the right to share Jesus. Changed hearts for Christ result in changed behavior. I fear some have forgotten what our primary mission/great commission is (Matt. 28:18-20). Jesus did not come to make bad people good, He came to make dead people live!

Our faith is NOT that God will miraculously change everything to be the way we think it should be. But rather that He is with us in the midst of the storm and He is ultimately the sovereign Master Chess Player.

Chuck Colson understood first-hand that political corruption could not only bring one's life down, but also our beloved country. His involvement with President Nixon and Watergate led to a felony conviction and prison time. But it also led to him placing his faith and hope in Jesus Christ rather than politics! As he powerfully stated: “I meet millions who tell me that they feel demoralized by the decay around us. Where is the hope? The hope that each of us have is not in who governs us, or what laws are passed, or what great things that we do as a nation. Our hope is in the power of God working through the hearts of people.” He added, “Christians are easily seduced by political power.”

Then I added, “Not by might, nor by power, nor by politicians, but by my Spirit says the Lord” (my loose translation of Zechariah 4:6).

II Chronicles 7:14 does not say that electing the right political party or leader will heal their land but rather “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray, seek my face . . . then I will heal their land.”