



# FOCUS ON JESUS

*"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2).*

“Stay focused and score.” The words caught my eye as I scanned the newspaper’s sports page so I could carry on a conversation with my sports-loving husband. A talented high school quarterback made the statement. With those two thoughts and 7.8 seconds left in the football game, the quarterback threw a touchdown pass, stunned his opponents, and led his team to a three-point victory against their biggest rival.

“Stay focused and score.” How can we apply these two simple thoughts to the Christian life and the race of faith we are called to run? Where should our focus be, and how do we score?

## **Focus on the Invisible**

As a chaplain in the Army, my husband Kerry was assigned to Fort Lewis, Washington, near Seattle. We were blessed to live there for two years, enjoying the Pacific Northwest’s beauty, especially Mount Rainier.

On a clear day, we could walk one block from our front door and have a full view of majestic Mount Rainier with its snow-capped peaks in all its beauty and splendor. Notice, I said, “On a clear day.” In two years, do you know how many days in that area are not clear?

I did not count, but I will just say, “A lot.” Many people visit and never get a glimpse of Mount Rainier because of the gray sky, misty rain, and numerous clouds.

But the sky is not always gray, and it does not rain all the time. On the sunny days when we could see Mount Rainier, we were ecstatic. The view brought Psalm 145:5 to life: “I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works.”

The beautiful landscape was the perfect setting for God to teach lessons about faith to a visual learner like me. On those long, cold, dreary days when I could not see Mount Rainier, I knew it was still there. I knew it would someday be visible again. It might take a while, but the clouds would leave, the sky would be bright blue again, and I would run to see my mountain.

That visual has stayed with me. On days when the clouds of doubt come, and the dreary gray skies of worry and anxiety blur my vision, I think of Mount Rainier and remember to focus on the invisible.

Reading the book of Psalms is a perfect way to focus on the greatness of God. In his commentary on Psalm 77, Warren Wiersbe notes, “When we look

at our circumstances, we focus on ourselves and see no hope, but when we look by faith to the Lord, our circumstances may not change, but we do. Look up by faith and rejoice in the greatness of God."



The secret to peace  
lies in your focus.

In her book, *Fixing My Eyes on Jesus*, Anne Graham Lotz tells of a young friend who began experiencing dreadful panic attacks. She went to see a psychiatrist who walked her through a simple exercise of listing everything that caused her to be afraid. When she finished her list, her fears so dominated her thinking that she could not function.

Lotz recommends that when you feel afraid, make up your list—not of fears, but God's characteristics. Reconsider your situation in light of who God is. Then claim His promise: "Fear not, for I am with thee" (Genesis 26:24b). The secret to peace lies in your focus.

By focusing on circumstances, we choose to feel anxiety and doubt. By focusing on the problem, we allow it to grow

and block our view of God and His mighty power.

Isaiah 26:3 reminds us, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." So, the question becomes, "How do I stay focused on the invisible? How do I intentionally fix my eyes on Jesus and not look at my circumstances, losing my focus and yielding to my fears?"

## Focus with Intention

Dr. Caroline Leaf, author of *Switch on Your Brain Every Day*, states, "You become what you think about the most. When you focus on something constantly and intentionally, you love and 'worship' it, giving it power over your mind and life."

As Christians, our goal is to be like Jesus, to love and worship Jesus, and to give Jesus power over our minds and lives. Doesn't it make sense that we should intentionally focus on Him?

Remember, whatever you focus on the most grows. Romans 8:5 reminds us, "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit." Where is your focus? Is it on the world that satisfies the sinful flesh, or on the things of the Spirit?



## Focus with Intensity

Two biblical champions of faith have much to teach us about how to stay focused and score. Both Peter and Stephen were chosen to be on significant New Testament teams. Jesus chose Peter to be one of His twelve disciples; the early Church chose Stephen to be one of seven deacons.

The gospels paint a vivid portrait of Peter, the big fisherman. He is revealed as a self-confident man who is bold, impulsive, courageous, and fearlessly daring. He was a man's man, ready at a moment's notice to pick up a sword (John 18:10) or jump into a stormy sea (Matthew 14:29).

Read Matthew 14:22-33 for the story of Peter walking on the Sea of Galilee. He literally took a leap of faith when he came down out of the boat and walked on water toward Jesus. He started with confidence, but as soon as he looked away from Jesus, saw the boisterous wind, and focused on his circumstances, fear overcame him.

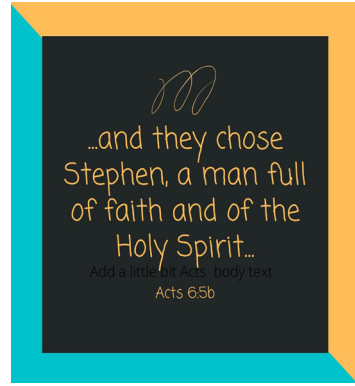
However, Peter knew whom to call on for help. It was not to his team in the boat but to his coach on the sea that he cried, "Lord, save me!" Not only did Jesus take Peter by the hand and

keep him from sinking, but He got in the boat with him. Notice what happened next. The wind ceased, and all those in the boat worshiped Jesus, saying, "Of a truth thou art the Son of God" (Matthew 14:33).

Peter's experience turned out

to be a blessing, not just for him but for the other disciples as well. When they saw the power of Jesus over the stormy sea, they saw His glory and worshiped Him. When God's great power and glory are revealed, we and others know that He is the Lord, and we bow to worship Him. This is a great victory. Jesus changed the circumstances of Peter's intense storm, but He did not choose to do that for Stephen. Read his story in Acts 6-7.

Notice the description of Stephen's character. He was full of faith and the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5). He was full of faith and power (Acts 6:8). The Holy Spirit within gave his face the brightness of an angel (Acts 6:15). He was filled with wisdom (Acts 6:3, 10). He knew the Scriptures.



In chapter 7, he covered the history of Israel from Abraham to Christ. He was very courageous as he boldly confronted his opponents (Acts 7:51-58). He was full of love as he prayed for the forgiveness of his accusers (Acts 7:60).

Pay close attention to Acts 7:55, which reads, “But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.” The word steadfast means “fixed” or “unchanging.” Stephen had his eyes fixed on Jesus.

What enabled Stephen to focus with such exceptionally great concentration, power, and force—to focus with intensity? He was full of the Holy Spirit. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, it’s a whole new ball game!

Have you ever watched coaches when games get intense? They rarely remain sitting. They stand, yell, give instructions, or cheer on the players. Notice that Acts 7:55 says Stephen saw Jesus “standing on the right hand of God.” Hebrews 12:2 states Jesus “sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Other references confirm the same fact (see Mark 16:19; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3, 10:12).

This experience was not only

intense for Stephen, but Jesus felt it as well. He stood to cheer Stephen on and welcome him across the finish line.

It is important to note when the storm occurred in Peter’s life, as described in Matthew 14, the Holy Spirit had not come yet. He did not come until after Jesus was crucified, rose again, and ascended back to Heaven.

While Peter had the privilege of seeing Jesus face to face physically, Stephen had the power within him to see Jesus with spiritual eyes. He had the Holy Spirit living in him, and we do, too! When we are surrendered to Jesus, allowing Him to fill us and control us, we can focus with intensity and make it to the finish line.

Did Stephen’s message have its intended effect? Did his final words of love and grace bring glory to Jesus? They were words that grabbed the attention of someone who was nearby watching.

Luke, the author of Acts, introduces Saul in 7:58. Saul, better known to us as the Apostle Paul, eventually became a valuable team player and intentionally ran the race of faith with intensity (2 Timothy 4:7). Stephen’s faith never wavered. He stayed focused and scored! May we do the same.

## Focus Inquisitively

How is your focus? Use the following study guide to intentionally direct your focus on the invisible with intensity.

1. Practice your ABC's. Use nouns or adjectives to create a praise list of the attributes of Jesus. For example, A—Almighty; B—Bountiful; C—Creator. Continue through the alphabet. On dreary days when clouds of doubt and gray skies of worry and anxiety hover over you, review your ABC's and remember to focus on the invisible.

2. Ponder the following Billy Graham quote from the book *Redeemed*: “At its deepest level, prayer is fellowship with God: enjoying His company, waiting upon His will, thanking Him for His mercies . . . listening in silence for what He has to say to us.”


Have you tried sitting quietly with God? Simply sit with Him, resting in His presence. Meditate on Psalm 46:10: “Be still and know that I am God.” As you focus with intention on Him, write down anything He reveals to you about your concerns.

3. Peter's leap of faith described in Matthew 14 significantly strengthened the other disciples' faith in the boat.

Stephen, the first martyr of the early Church, had a profound effect on young Saul, the Pharisee who persecuted Christians. He became the Apostle Paul—missionary, church planter, and author of thirteen New Testament books.

Read Hebrews 11 for examples from the Old Testament of people who are commended for their faith. These are the witnesses mentioned in Hebrews 12:1.

Who has influenced you on your journey of faith? What about your Legacy of Faith? What will be said about you when your race is done? Is your life bringing glory to God and leading others to Jesus?

“Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:1b-2a). 

**About the Writer:** Brenda lives in Semmes, Alabama, with her husband Kerry Steedley, a retired Free Will Baptist Army chaplain. She enjoys all things domestic, especially nurturing her five growing grandchildren.