

Focus on Following

FOCUS THOUGHT

No matter the distractions, we must choose to focus on following the Lord.

»» FOCUS VERSE

II Kings 2:2

And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Beth-el. And Elisha said unto him, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Beth-el.

»» LESSON TEXT

II Kings 2:1–4; 11–15

1 And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.

2 And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Beth-el. And Elisha said unto him, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Beth-el.

3 And the sons of the prophets that were at Beth-el came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.

4 And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho.

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11 And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

12 And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.

13 He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan;

14 And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over.

15 And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him.

BE THE AFTERSHOCK

The first rattling of an earthquake is referred to as the mainshock. However, once the initial shaking subsides, there are usually aftershocks. Aftershocks are caused by the readjusting of the plates that were shifted during the mainshock. The bigger the earthquake, the more aftershocks and the longer they can last. The earthquake of 1906 in San Francisco is reported to have had aftershocks that affected Southern California, Nevada, Oregon, and Arizona.

When an earthquake happens, there is no question of whether there will be aftershocks; they always follow. There are safety protocols and guidelines on how to prepare for earthquakes and their aftershocks, but scientists have not discovered any method to stop them. Once an earthquake begins, there is no stopping what will follow.

The earthquake makes its mark, and the aftershock follows in its path. Aftershocks are so consistent that scientists can determine a range in which they will occur. There is not a question of if, but when.

As disciples of Christ, what would happen if we were to become the true aftershock of Jesus? If we follow Him consistently, others will have no doubt of who Jesus is, and what He does will naturally flow through us. We can be His aftershock, following His lead and helping those He has touched to adjust to a new life in Him.

OUTLINE

I. THE LORD SENT ELIJAH SEVERAL PLACES

- A. Elijah Told Elisha to Stop Following
- B. The Lord Wants to Know If We Will Continue to Follow Him

II. SONS OF THE PROPHETS BROUGHT DISTRACTION

- A. Elisha Told the Distractions to Be Quiet and He Kept Following
- B. We Must Choose to Focus, Despite the Distractions

III. ELIJAH PERMITTED ELISHA TO MAKE A LAST REQUEST

- A. A Double Portion
- B. God Honors the Prayers of Those Who Follow Him

IV. ELIJAH WAS TAKEN AWAY IN A FIERY CHARIOT

- A. Elisha Kept His Eyes on the Mantle
- B. Where Is the Lord God of Elijah?
- C. God's Power Follows Those Who Follow Him

V. NO MATTER THE DISTRACTIONS, WE MUST FOCUS ON FOLLOWING THE LORD

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

In 2015, reports show that 3,477 people were killed and an estimated additional 391,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes involving distracted drivers; 10 percent of fatal crashes, 15 percent of injury crashes, and 14 percent of all police-reported traffic crashes were reported as being affected by distractions; 9 percent of all drivers fifteen to nineteen years old involved in fatal crashes were distracted at the time of the crashes (this age group has the largest proportion of distracted drivers at the time of fatal crashes); 551 non-occupants (pedestrians, bicyclists, and others) were killed in distraction-affected crashes (<https://www.enddd.org>). In each year following, these statistics have increased.

Distracted driving comes in three different forms: (1) Cognitive distraction or mental distraction is when a driver's mind is not focused on driving. Talking to another passenger or being preoccupied with personal, family, or work-related issues are some examples. Even listening to a favorite podcast or radio station can put a driver at risk; the audio can take the

focus away from driving and the overall surroundings. (2) Visual distraction occurs when a driver looks at anything other than the road ahead. Even checking a child's seat belt while driving is visually distracting. Electronic devices for the car, such as GPS devices and portable DVDs or digital entertainment systems, also distract drivers. (3) Manual distraction happens when a driver takes one or both hands off the wheel for any reason. Some common examples include eating and drinking in the car, adjusting the GPS, or trying to get something from a purse, wallet, or briefcase.

The highway of life is also filled with distractions that take our focus off following the Lord. It is easy to be turned aside by the little things of life and to lose focus on what really matters. We need to always remember that those momentary glances at things that detract from following God could prove to be spiritually fatal.

»» SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. THE LORD SENT ELIJAH SEVERAL PLACES

The story of Elisha following Elijah provides us insight into what it means to remain focused on the journey. After choosing to follow Elijah, Elisha returned home and said some final goodbyes to life as he had known it. He would be leaving behind his mother and father and the security of a future already laid out for him.

Elisha had no way of knowing that the journey with Elijah would take many twists and turns. Perhaps Elisha thought the anointing would simply be his because he had accepted the mantle. He may not have realized there would be a long season of simply following, in order to receive all God had for him.

The two left Gilgal together. Soon after, Elijah turned to Elisha and told him the Lord was sending Elijah to Bethel. From Bethel he would be instructed to go on to Jericho. The stay in Jericho would be brief as the Lord further instructed Elijah to travel to Jordan. Elisha was finding out that following was much more involved and strenuous than he perhaps had first thought.

A. Elijah Told Elisha to Stop Following

At each point along the journey, Elijah turned to Elisha and told him to remain in the place he found himself presently. Elijah told Elisha to stay in Gilgal, then in Bethel, and then in Jericho. Each destination brought a straightforward instruction to "stay."

No doubt it would have been somewhat discouraging and disheartening to Elisha to be told to quit following, time and time again. After all, he had accepted the mantle and wanted to follow the prophet of God. He had left all he had ever known, and following after Elijah had become everything to him. And yet Elisha continued to follow.

» *Why do you think Elijah kept offering to let Elisha stay behind?*

B. The Lord Wants to Know If We Will Continue to Follow Him

In living for God, the journey is not always as easy as we expect. Many times we feel a major hurdle or stop sign has been thrown into our pathway. Other times life seems

to be going along fine, and we anticipate great things happening. Then, suddenly, distractions appear that could easily take our focus off the Lord.

The Lord wants to know if we will continue to follow Him. He knows how easily we can be distracted from what really matters. Several times in Scripture the Lord tested people's commitment to see whether they would remain faithful followers. Moses had to lead Israel through the wilderness in search of the Promised Land. Abraham had to follow God to the top of Mount Moriah when it would have been easier not to go. Simon Peter had to follow Jesus by walking on a stormy sea. When many others had ceased following Jesus, He asked the disciples, "Will you also go away?"

God knows it is easy to follow Him when He is answering our prayers and saying "yes" to our requests. But there will be times when it seems as if everything in life has turned upside down, and the journey could come to a standstill. In those times God finds out just how committed we are to following Him.

» *Can you recall a time when it seemed as if it would be easier to just stop instead of continuing to follow the Lord? Explain.*

II. SONS OF THE PROPHETS BROUGHT DISTRACTION

Every day we are surrounded by noise—the noise of traffic and workplaces, the noise of family and homelife, and even the noise that comes with being at church. Among the noise are voices. Voices are constantly vying for our attention and seeking influence in our lives.

The challenge is to know which voices to listen to and which ones are merely distractions. Elisha was surrounded by the noises of his day as well as the voices of the sons of the prophets. It would seem they were well-intentioned voices. Each stop on the journey brought an audience of these men before Elisha.

Quite honestly, they were telling him the truth. But to Elisha they were just stating the obvious, telling him things he already knew would happen. In so doing they became a distraction that could have caused him to lose focus.

A. Elisha Told the Distractions to Be Quiet and He Kept Following

How would Elisha respond? What would he do with the distractions that kept showing up at every place he went following Elijah? Perhaps Elisha would give in to the voices and become discouraged after realizing the elder prophet would indeed be taken from him.

Better yet, maybe Elisha should stop and reason with the sons of the prophets and try to explain why he was doing what he was doing. Maybe he should just agree with them and convince himself that all this following was foolishness. After all, he had followed the prophet all over the world and back again.

Elisha chose the wisest response of all. He refused to allow the distractions to change his direction. Although the voices were speaking truth, Elisha knew if he gave

in to them, he would quickly lose his way. By speaking to the voices and silencing them, Elisha allowed his focus to remain steadfastly on Elijah.

B. We Must Choose to Focus, Despite the Distractions

Every distraction requires a decision. It is totally up to us what we will do when distractions come. We can yield to them and lose sight of where God is taking us, or we can refuse to allow them to turn us aside from the journey. These are decisions only we can make.

However, without a made-up mind willing to stay focused on God, it is nearly impossible to faithfully follow Him. At times we will have to take authority over the distractions in order to be successful. II Corinthians 10:5 gives some great advice concerning this: “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” In other words, we must control our thoughts to avoid being distracted. The best solution for avoiding distractions is bringing every thought captive to the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His purpose in our lives.

» *What are some practical things you can do to help avoid distractions?*

III. ELIJAH PERMITTED ELISHA TO MAKE A LAST REQUEST

Elijah knew the time for his departure was near. He had also seen Elisha’s faithfulness in following him. It was then Elijah made an incredible offer to Elisha, an offer that almost seemed too good to be true. Elijah said to Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee” (II Kings 2:9).

Can you imagine? It was as if Elisha had received a blank check from the great prophet Elijah. Elisha could ask for anything his heart desired. The only limitation would be what his imagination could dream up.

A. A Double Portion

Interestingly, Elisha did not ask for anything to make his life easier. He did not request financial blessings or material things. Neither did he look for anything to assure his future would be one of comfort. Instead he replied, “I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me” (II Kings 2:9).

Talk about reaching for the stars! Of all the things Elisha could have asked for, he asked for what most people would have never even considered. But his heart was on the things of God. Elisha knew just how much the miraculous ministry of Elijah had impacted God’s people. More than anything he wanted a life that would be even more impacting.

His concern was not for the things of this world. He was not worried right then about food, shelter, or clothing. His heart was on the kingdom of God.

B. God Honors the Prayers of Those Who Follow Him

Jesus told His followers in Matthew 6:33, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” He was not ignoring the needs of daily life. He was impressing upon them that it was more important to stay focused on the things of the Kingdom than to become distracted by the things of this world. And just as He did with Elisha, the Lord will honor those who do not become distracted, but keep Him first in their lives.

Elijah told Elisha that he had asked a hard thing. But it was not an impossible request. Elijah then went on to say Elisha’s request would be honored if he did not get distracted, but he kept his eyes on Elijah until he was taken up to the Lord. Elijah wanted Elisha to realize following never really ends. Elisha would have to keep looking diligently to receive the blessing God wanted to give him.

IV. ELIJAH WAS TAKEN AWAY IN A FIERY CHARIOT

Elisha had no promise of just how long he would need to keep following. For all he knew, it would be years before Elijah was taken away from him. Elisha made up in his mind that regardless of how long it would be, he would be right on Elijah’s heels every day.

While continuing the journey and the conversation, out of the heavens appeared a chariot of fire being pulled by horses of fire. The moment had finally arrived in a rather dramatic way.

A. Elisha Kept His Eyes on the Mantle

The chariot separated Elijah from Elisha, but Elisha kept his eyes on his mentor. The mantle Elijah cast upon Elisha on that monumental day of his calling (I Kings 19:19) never left his sight. Though many things came his way and could have distracted him, Elisha never wavered. He ignored the temptation to simply give up, and he ignored the voices of the sons of the prophets. And he did not allow the flaming chariot and horses to cause him to lose focus.

» *What are some of the distractions you have seen turn people away from God?*

B. Where Is the Lord God of Elijah?

Elisha watched as the mantle fell to the ground. Immediately he grabbed it up in his arms and held it to his chest. He did not question where Elijah had gone. He was not left to wonder what had just happened. He knew of a certainty that this was the moment for which he had been faithfully following.

He ran to the bank of the Jordan River and cried out to the heavens, “Where is the LORD God of Elijah?” (II Kings 2:14). His appeal was no longer to Elijah; it was now to God. The mantle was resting squarely on his shoulders, and he was about to prove that the same God who had been with Elijah would also be with him.

C. God's Power Follows Those Who Follow Him

Taking an action born of great faith, Elisha struck the waters of the Jordan with the mantle that was now his. He fully expected God to respond because he knew God's power will always follow them that believe. For many long days and nights, Elisha had been faithful. He had every right to believe God would part the waters.

God honors those who faithfully follow Him. In Mark 16:17–18 Jesus told the people who had gathered around Him, “And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” Immediately after, Jesus was received up into Heaven in much the same way Elijah had been taken.

» *In what ways does God honor those who are faithful?*

V. NO MATTER THE DISTRACTIONS, WE MUST FOCUS ON FOLLOWING THE LORD

Starting the journey to live for the Lord is often the easiest part. The hardest part is staying faithful during the long, weary days of life. Distractions that come our way can make it difficult to continue to follow. But never forget what James declared, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (James 1:12). Those who endure the temptation to be distracted will be blessed. God will reward them. For Elisha the blessing was the mantle of the prophet who went on before him. For us, if we are faithful and avoid distractions, it will be an eternal crown of life.

»» INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

It is easy to follow the Lord when the road is paved and the answers are all “yes.” But faithful following is not proven by being there when things are going our way. Faithful following is proven by being there when everything and everyone around is telling us to stop.

Just as Elisha had to determine that nothing would stop him from following Elijah, we must determine that nothing will stop us from following the Lord. Just like Elisha, we must silence the distractions in our lives in order to keep our eyes and ears on the Lord. We cannot afford to allow the distractions to become our primary focus.

Distracted drivers cause accidents and fatalities. Distracted spiritual drivers cause spiritual accidents and even spiritual fatalities. It is time to remove things that catch our eyes and divert our attention and our actions from focusing on God. Our focus needs to be on seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness. He will take care of everything else.