

The Power of Attention

Opening Text: Acts 3:1-8

This passage describes a man severely disabled from birth. He is over 40 years of age and has no means to either go to where he wants to go, or to support himself. Every day of his life he relies on the good will of others to help him get to the temple, where he can beg in order to survive.

Life hasn't been easy for him, but he is a survivor. He keeps fighting. He keeps coming back to the entrance of the temple, day after day. He understands that the temple is probably where people are most likely to be moved with compassion and help him.

We find him in this story, at the second hour of prayer in the temple. The people in Jerusalem followed the rhythms dictated by what happened in the temple: there were at least 2 times for sacrifices and there were 3 set times for prayer during the day.

Being the hour of prayer, there were great numbers of people flocking into the temple. It was the busiest of times. For this man this was "prime time".

There were other times when the temple was not as busy, and I am sure there were many moments when that man was overcome by boredom. However, not now. He is alert, his eyes are looking frantically through the crowd for some generous soul who would heed his appeal for alms.

As his eyes anxiously scan through the crowd, Peter and John stand before him and ministered healing to him. All the money in the world would have not solved his problem but the name of Jesus gave him perfect soundness. What a moment! What a gift! What a great Jesus!

However, I would like to highlight something that had to happen for this man to receive from God – and that is the object of the message today:

The power of attention

V.4-5 - *4 And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us." 5 So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.*

Prior to using their faith or speaking healing over him, they first had to get his attention. Had his eyes been wandering through the crowd and his mind busy with all that was happening, he would have missed the power of that moment. Distraction could have kept him from the greatest day of his life.

That principle is well illustrated in the story of Mary and Martha. Martha missed the moment and missed all the benefits and the blessings available to her in that visitation of Jesus, simple because she was distracted:

Luke 10:40 - *But Martha was distracted with much serving...*

Most of us battle in this area. Life gets busy, the demands and pressures of life are sometimes overwhelming. It is easy to get distracted. We are driven away from the moment, from God's presence and from all that can be ours if we stay focused on Jesus.

Also, we live in a world awash with distractions of every kind. Digital technology in all its forms is one of those. We live overstimulated, digital dependant lives. Our brains are being re-wired and becoming more restless and anxious in the process.

Dr. Archibald D. Hart wrote a great book on that: "*Digital Invasion – how technology is shaping you and your relationships*"

Paying attention and living focused are crucial to walking in all that God has for us.

Proverbs 4:20-22 - *My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings. 21 do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; 22 For they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh.*

The man in Acts 3 received, because he surrendered his attention. Peter and John got hold of his focus.

1 Timothy 4:13, 15 - *Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. 15 - Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.*

The other problem of living distracted lives and not surrendering our attention fully to God is that it will affect our own walk and relationship with Him.

Hebrews 2:1 ESV - *Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.*

God deserves undivided attention.

"Learning to pay attention is the necessary muscle of prayer and of the whole Christian life"

- Simone Weil (French philosopher who lived in the 1930's)

3 Keys to a Focused Life:

1. Slow down

Most of us hurry through life and we live in the fast lane all the time. We need to slow down. Some things can't be done in a hurry – like your relationship with God.

Mark 12:30 - *And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment.*

Do not pray nervous prayers, in a hurry, trying to fit God into your busy schedule. It is not good to multitask when it comes to God and you:

Ecclesiastes 5:2 - *Do not be rash with your mouth and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth...*

1 Samuel 9:27 AMPC - *27 And as they were going down to the outskirts of the city, Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us—and he passed on—but you stand still, first, that I may cause you to hear the word of God.*

“The high value put upon every minute of time, the idea of hurry-hurry as the most important objective of living, is unquestionably the most dangerous enemy of joy”
- Herman Hesse

2. Tone down

1 Corinthians 14:10 says that there are so many voices in this world. Tone down all the other voices that surround you, all that external noise. Focus on the only voice that matters: God's.

Psalms 46:10 - *“Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”*

3. Calm down

Sometimes our inattentiveness is the result of our own anxieties. Our minds race in every direction fuelled by fear and doubt. God tells us to be still and know that He is God!

Proverbs 17:27b - *... a man of understanding is of a calm spirit.*

Know, understand and believe that He is God! – you will have a calm spirit.

Isaiah 26:3 - *You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You [focused, attentive, centred on you], because he trusts in You.*

How do you do that? How do you stop an anxious mind?

Proverbs 16:3 - *Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established.*

Conclusion

Sometimes we limit all the potential of what God could do in our lives simply because we live distracted. We miss God-ordained moments, we miss His word for our lives, or we let miracles pass us by because we don't live attentive to Him. There is way too much white noise, distraction and interference. Our minds are overstimulated by all these external voices. Let us slow down, tone down and calm down! Let us fully engage our attention!