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MONDAY MANNA
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FOCUSING ON WHAT REALLY MATTERS **By Jim Langley**

A while ago I was having a series of discussions with a young man about his new-found faith in Jesus Christ, focusing especially on what really matters in life and work. Having a proper focus can dramatically change the course of our individual lives. For instance, when a team is focused, whether in a workplace or an athletic field, it can greatly affect the results of their efforts. Not only in terms of achieving success, but also in knowing they are striving for excellence as they pursue a desired goal.

Over the years I have known this young fellow, it has become evident that he has been very focused in certain aspects of his life. However, his focus – an intense desire to become the best in a particular endeavor – has come at the expense of other facets of his life. That realization led us to talk about the significance of striking a proper balance, keeping things in the right priority.

I have learned this through personal experience going back more than 50 years. My first passion was baseball. Then golf took over in first place. I somehow completed college in four years, but my focus was definitely not on learning all that I could during those intense years of undergraduate study. Only later in life did I understand how important it is to focus properly on the various aspects of our complex lives.

My golf game has become an example for me. These days, I know there are times to focus on the next shot and then there are times to turn my focus to what's going on around me. Golf has become a social outlet for me, so it would be quite inconsiderate to block out my playing partners and only focus on my game. That would detract from my greater goal to simply enjoy the walk around the course with friends. Even in competitive rounds, I still do my best to remain sociable and enjoy the company of others.

Early on in my insurance career I bought into the corporate philosophy of increasing my activity in order to help more clients and earn more money. It took four days of hospitalization with double pneumonia for God to get my attention and shift my attention onto what really matters. My focus turned from the love of money to a deep love of God and His people. That was the beginning of my journey of learning to love and care for those He places in my life every day.

As a follower of Christ, I have come to understand that I need to be obedient to my Savior and Lord, and His desire is for me to reflect on the oldest prayer found in Scripture, which is called the Shema'. Part of my daily prayer each morning, drawing from Jesus' words in Matthew 22:37-39, goes something like this: *"Lord, I love you with all my heart, with all my soul, with all*

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my mind and with all my strength. Lord, please help me to love others as I love myself.”

In our roles in the marketplace, we have goals and objectives. Production and profits are at the forefront of our minds. But if we are to be effective, fruitful ambassadors for Christ, as 2 Corinthians 5:20 describes us, we would be wise to consider the apostle Paul's counsel on what he termed “the fruit of the Spirit”: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”* Then he adds, *“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not be conceited, provoking and envying each other”* (Galatians 5:22-26).

If we truly love the Lord and desire for our lives to reflect that, we need to focus on what really matters and live our lives accordingly.

© 2022, all rights reserved. Jim Langley has been writing for more than 30 years while working as a life and health insurance agent. In recent years, his passion has turned to writing about his relationship with God. His goal is to encourage others to draw near to Him as well. A long-time member of CBMC, he started writing “Fourth Quarter Strategies” in 2014.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe having a focus for your life? What things typically take priority as you approach the start of each day?
2. What do you think happens when we choose the wrong focus for our lives?
3. Should we make a consistent, intentional effort to determine those things on which we choose to focus? What might result if we fail to seriously evaluate what we focus on and why?
4. In what ways can a determination to focus on loving and honoring God, and then in loving others – even sacrificially if necessary – influence our approach to our jobs and the outcomes we experience?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:
Joshua 1:7-8; Ephesians 5:8-11; Philippians 3:7-9, 12-14; 1 Timothy 6:11-12

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