

Sermon: All This and Heaven Too

Text: 1 Peter 1:13-21

Discussion Questions:

Concentration is defined as: *“The action or power of focusing one's attention or mental effort.”*

Some people seem to be good at concentrating. Others—well, not so good.

- Why do you think that is? Why are some people good at focusing their attention and exercising the power of concentration—while other people really seem to struggle?
 - How much does physiology (the way our bodies function) have to do with it?
 - Is concentration a learned behavior? Is it something we can get better at with practice?
 - What are some practical ways that people can increase their ability to concentrate?

- Distractions are the great “enemy” of a person’s ability to concentrate. They divert our focus. They draw our attention elsewhere.
 - How much do you, personally, struggle with distractions when you really want to concentrate on something?
 - Give some examples of the things that distract you.
 - What do you do to overcome distractions? Does it work?

- In a spiritual sense, distractions can be a prime “tool” that the devil uses to keep us from focusing on God—or the things of God.
 - How much do you have to fight against distractions when you go to pray, meditate, or read your Bible?
 - Why do you think Satan works so hard to shift our focus off of God?
 - What does it take to overcome these distractions?

Examination:

Read **Philippians 4:4-9**

- What do these six verses have to say about our minds—and the things we choose to think about?
- Paul begins this passage by telling us to *“rejoice in the Lord always.”*
 - Is rejoicing something we can DECIDE to do?
 - How do we rejoice *“in the Lord”*? What does that mean?
 - How much mental focus does it require to rejoice in the Lord—especially when things in our life aren’t going well?
 - What distracts or diverts our focus when we attempt to rejoice?
- Anxiety plays a big part in robbing us of joy—or in keeping us from rejoicing. What does Paul say with respect to being anxious (v. 6)? What are the keys to overcoming anxiety that Paul outlines in verse 6?
- When we go to God in prayer and thanksgiving, something very significant happens in our mind (v. 7). What do you think it means for the peace of God to guard your mind? What is your mind guarded from?
- Verse 6 dealt with the issue of distractions and anxiety. Verse 8 addresses the issue of focus and concentration. Make a list of the things that Paul is instructing us to focus upon.

- Why do you think God wants us to focus our thoughts on things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy? What is the result that God intends as we do this?
- It's one thing to appreciate the beauty and poetry of a verse like this. We would all agree that Philippians 4:8 looks really good on a poster with a pretty sunset or a kitten. BUT—how difficult is it to actually put this verse into practice? How much of a battle is it to turn OFF negative and worry-some thoughts...and intentionally focus on pure and excellent thoughts?
- **Read 1 Peter 1:13-16**
 - Much like Paul focuses on our minds in Philippians 4, Peter begins this body of his letter (verses 1-12 were the introduction) by calling us to have *"minds that are alert and fully sober."*
 - The word **alert** means: "Quick to notice any unusual and potentially dangerous or difficult circumstances; vigilant." What potential danger do you think Peter is calling us to be on the guard against?
 - The word **sober** isn't just referring to abstinence from alcohol (although that's certainly part of it). It also means to be dignified, self-controlled, clear-headed and of sound mind. Read **1 Peter 5:8**, and discuss what can happen when we fail to have an alert and sober mind.
 - What is Peter calling us to maintain our focus upon (v. 13)?
 - Verse 14 seems to indicate that "evil desires" don't seem to magically disappear when we place our faith in Jesus. Has that been your experience? Have you continued to struggle with evil desires that seem to wage war against your soul?
 - What does it mean to "be holy in all you do" (v. 15)? How difficult is this to do? Is God expecting too much from us? How vital is it that we maintain our focus—and have minds that are alert and fully sober?
 - What do you think it means when Peter says that we are to "live out our time as foreigners here in reverent fear" (v. 17)?
 - What lengths did God go to in order to "purchase" or "redeem" us from the empty way of life that has been handed down to us (v. 18)?
 - The phrase "empty way of life" is actually quite a vivid picture. What does this mean to you? What are some examples of an empty way of life?
 - What do you think it means that Jesus was "chosen before the creation of the world" (v. 20)? Does this mean that Jesus knew before Genesis 1:1 that He would have to die on the cross for our sins? Why in the world would Jesus create the world if He knew that He would have to die on the cross to deliver it?
 - What is the ultimate object (or focus) of our faith and hope (v. 21)?

Application:

We're told in 2 Corinthians 10:5 to *"demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."* This requires a great deal of focus and concentration. Make it your goal this week to keep your thoughts centered on God. Make every effort to NOT worry. Memorize **Philippians 4:8**—and recite it often, especially when you sense doubt or distraction is taking your focus off of God.