

STAYING FOCUSED

MERVIN SUNDBO

The Scripture in Proverbs 29:18 says, *"Where there is no revelation (a prophetic vision), the people cast off restraint: but happy is he that keeps the law"* (NKJV). In other words, there is happiness in staying focused on the revelation that God by His Spirit has made known to us, as His word has been enlightened to our hearts.

Israel was a prime example of losing the focus that God had made known to them. They knew what the will of God was, but they often chose not to obey or were distracted and lost their way. Here are a few examples of Israel choosing their way rather than God's way:

1. They tired of the manna, the perfect food, and hankered for meat. Under God's blessing and the heavenly food, He had promised he would take away all sickness and would not afflict them with the terrible diseases of Egypt (Deuteronomy 7:15) and even their clothes did not wear out (Deuteronomy 29:5). The meat, however, *"sent leanness (wasting disease) into their soul"* (Psalm 106:15, NKJV). So, they went from good health and contentment with what God had provided (manna) to disease and discontent by requesting and getting what they wanted (meat).
2. They began to focus on the nations round about them who were governed by kings. Their focus shifted from the perfect ruler (God Himself) to human rulership. 1 Samuel 8:7, *"And the Lord said to Samuel, 'Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them'"* (NKJV). Israel suffered under many kings who did not walk in the ways of the Lord.
3. They were instructed not to give their sons and daughters in marriage to the heathen nations, but it wasn't long before they were doing exactly that. Then, just as God had said, their hearts were turned from the God of Israel to the heathen gods of these nations. Psalm 106:35-38, *"But they mingled with the Gentiles and learned their works; they served their idols, which became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons, and shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood"* (NKJV). This is how far Israel had gotten off track. They had lost the vision and had fallen into the snare of disobedience.

4. They listened to the evil report of the ten spies rather than the good report of Caleb and Joshua and thought it better to return to Egypt (the land of oppression) rather than going against the giants over which God had promised them victory. As a result of their unbelief, the older generations were not permitted to enter the promised land. *"Except for Caleb ... and Joshua ..., you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in. But your little ones, ... I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised"* (NKJV).

Solomon began, as king of Israel, walking in the statutes of David, his father. God acknowledged the humility of Solomon and granted his request for wisdom to judge Israel and to discern between good and evil. He was the wisest man that ever lived or ever will live (1 Kings 3:12). God made this promise to Solomon in 1 Kings 3:14, *"So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days"* (NKJV). However, in process of time, Solomon's focus changed. In my NKJV Bible at the beginning of 1 Kings chapter 11, the heading reads, "Solomon's Heart Turns from the Lord" and we read in verses 1 and 2, *"But King Solomon loved many foreign women ... from the nations of whom the Lord said to the children of Israel, 'You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.' Solomon clung to these in love"* (NKJV). Solomon had everything any human being could ever wish for, including the blessing of God on his life and on his kingship, but his undoing was to fall into the trap of disobedience. He died at age 52.

Let us consider one example of losing focus from the New Testament. Peter walked on the water so long as his focus was on the Lord (Matt. 14:22-33). But when he lost focus and fixed his

eyes on the storm, he became fearful, doubt set in and he began to sink in the waters of the stormy sea.

Let us not be too hard on Peter, for we have very likely found ourselves in circumstances where we have lost focus on Christ our Saviour and focused on our problems. *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death"* (Proverbs 14:12, NKJV). He makes a way where there seems to be no way.

We can apply the Scriptures to our circumstances today, otherwise, they have no value. The revelation that has been given over the years is as good today as when it was spoken. Israel was influenced by the Gentile nations or you might say by the world creeping into their midst. They began to do as they did. The church today can fall into the same trap. The world creeps in little by little until there is little difference between the church and the world.

The church is the bride of Christ. He is not interested in a contaminated bride, but rather *"that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish"* (Ephesians 5:27, NKJV). Romans 12:2 says, *"Be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind"* (NKJV).

I remember something one of the brethren said a few years ago, "The saddest sight in all the world is to see the bride of Christ walking in the ways of the world." We are bombarded with the philosophies of men, with the thinking of the world, with the behaviour of the world; there are many voices, but *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me"* (John 10:27, NKJV). May God help us to remain faithful to the calling unto which He has called us.✝

SOFTEN OUR HEARTS LORD

DAVID COTCHER

In our service we sang as a prayer the chorus:
*"Soften my heart, Lord, soften my heart.
 From all indifference set me apart.
 To feel your compassion, to weep with your tears,
 Come soften my heart, O Lord, soften my heart."*

Soften our hearts, O Lord, is our prayer. Our hearts can be hardened by our daily lives in the world. We desire that God will soften our hearts as we walk with Him day by day. Then we can show forth God's love and compassion from our hearts. By the experiences we go through, God can plant His faith within our hearts and let it grow. We will walk in unity with one heart and one mind.

Paul writing to the Ephesians, exhorted them, *"And be ye kind one to another; tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you"* (Ephesians 4:32, KJV). We need to be tenderhearted, with our hearts softened by yielding to the Holy Spirit. Then we will show kindness, and love, and have hearts of forgiveness toward one another.

My mother told us that she went to the front in special meetings near their farm home when she was nine years old and the evangelist quoted the scripture to her *"And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out*

of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 11:19). She didn’t fully understand what that meant, that she could have a stony heart that could be made soft. But she believed it and she accepted Jesus into her heart as her Saviour.

It is something that we don’t have to understand with our mind, we believe in our heart by faith. We receive a new spiritual heart when we accept Christ, and then as we walk with Him day by day the softening our heart is the work of the Holy Spirit. We know it is not talking about our natural heart that pumps our blood. I looked up the Bible definition of our heart. It says it is our inner being, the centre of our physical and spiritual life. It is where God can work with our inner being, and He wants it to be open to Him and the moving of His Holy Spirit. He sent the Holy Spirit that He might work on our hearts. It is a day-by-day, step-by-step experience, changing our hearts.

“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Ezekiel 36:26-27, KJV). Moses brought the Ten Commandments written by God on stone tablets, but now God is writing His law on our hearts. We have a new heart by His Spirit within us, and with His laws written on our hearts, we desire to do what He wants us to do. We walk in His ways as He changes our hearts by His Spirit dwelling in us.

When one of the young men led our service, he talked about allowing God to change our hearts and had us sing the song:

“Change my heart, oh God, make it ever true
Change my heart, oh God, may I be like You
You are the Potter, I am the clay
Mould me and make me, this is what I pray
Change my heart, oh God, make it ever true
Change my heart, oh God, may I be like You.”

God is changing our hearts like the potter molds the clay into a vessel fit for His use. We read about the potter and the clay in the book of Jeremiah. *“The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, ‘Arise, and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words.’ Then I went down to the potter’s house, and behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel”* (Jeremiah 18:1-6, KJV). God does not give up on us, even as the potter didn’t on the marred vessel, but He keeps on moulding and shaping our lives to be like Him, as we are yielded to His Holy Spirit.

We need to have our hearts softened before Him that we can surrender our lives to Him. We had a message some time ago on absolute surrender, that process where He is working on us day by day to surrender our lives fully to Him. Soften our hearts, O Lord. Let us be like that clay which the potter is shaping into a vessel which is surrendered to His purpose, according to our own place in the Body of Christ by our gifts and ministries. Praise God because He is shaping us into that vessel as the potter molds the clay.

The psalmist, David, was a man after God’s own heart. God didn’t look on the outward appearance, but He looked on the heart when He chose David to be king. We see in the Scriptures that David did many great sins, but he repented. We read his prayer of repentance in Psalm 51. *“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free spirit”* (Psalm 51:10-12, KJV). He repented, and allowed God to soften his heart and renew a right Spirit. That is why he had a heart that God could work with. He allowed God to renew and create in him a clean heart. When we sin, we need to repent and ask for forgiveness through Jesus Christ, and as we humble ourselves our hearts are softened, and a right Spirit is renewed.

The Bible compares our hearts to the soil that God can cultivate and in which He can plant His seed as the gardener or farmer. *“I said, ‘Plant the good seeds of righteousness, and you will harvest a crop of love. Plow up the hard ground of your hearts, for now is the time to seek the Lord, that He may come and shower righteousness upon you’”* (Hosea 10:12, NLT). Allow your hearts to be cultivated, as the soil worked up by the Holy Spirit, that the seed can be planted, and He can come and rain righteousness upon you. That is what God is doing. We have heard messages about having the faith of God, not a faith that we generate in ourselves in any way, but He just comes and plants His faith in our hearts. Our hearts must be ready. The soil has to be softened before Him that He can come and plant His faith within us and cause it can grow. The faith that the Scripture says is just a grain of mustard seed, grows and springs up as we have that day-by-day experience with Him.

The parable of the sower and the seed is in Matthew 13:3-9. Starting in verse 18 Jesus explained the parable. *“Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower: When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the wayside. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty”* (Matthew 13:18-23, KJV).

We know different things that come in the world can interfere with the growth of the seed that God is planting in our hearts. The scripture says that we will go through tribulation and persecution. God will allow testing and trials to come in our lives. If we respond by opening our hearts before Him, those experiences can work to soften our hearts and make our hearts ready to receive His word. Jesus said the ones that were offended were like the stony ground where the seed could not take root. Their hearts were hardened, and the seed could not grow because of it. The testings and trials will come, but what happens as a result depends on our attitude and how we respond. If we allow God’s Holy Spirit to work in our lives, our hearts can be cultivated, and we can become able to receive the seed and the growth which He has for us. We will not

allow the weeds and the cares of life to choke out God's word but become that good ground that brings forth fruit. We need Him to plant His faith in our hearts. We try to generate it ourselves with all our efforts, but He alone can plant it there and give us that good soil that can allow it to grow. Praise His Holy name.


There are many scriptures about believing in our hearts. When the disciples did not believe, Jesus said they had hardness of heart. *"Afterward He appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen"* (Mark 16:14, KJV).

Oh Lord, we pray you will soften the hardness of unbelief in our hearts, that we will really believe in our hearts by Your faith planted there. Jesus said, *"For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith"* (Mark 11:23, KJV). That is not by our own believing in our mind but having a heart that will believe and not doubt. Let us allow God to work by His Holy Spirit and have our hearts softened before Him, and He will give us a heart which can believe by the faith which He plants there.

In Acts 8, we read Philip was taken by the Spirit and came upon the Ethiopian in his chariot and he told him about Jesus through the prophecies in Isaiah. The Ethiopian asked if he could be baptised. *"And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God"* (Acts 8:37, KJV). You must believe with all your heart. Philip could see that the Ethiopian wasn't just believing with his natural thinking. It had been planted in his heart. He said the Ethiopian could be baptized in water because he could see that he believed with all his heart that Jesus is the Son of God. *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"* (Romans 10:9-10, KJV). That is the believing which He plants deep down in our hearts.

In John 14, Jesus comforts His disciples. *"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid"* (John 14:27, KJV). He said I am going to be leaving you, but do not let your heart be troubled. He promised to send the Holy Spirit, so we need not have anxiety or fear, the opposite of faith and trust. Just let the Holy Spirit minister peace and comfort to your hearts. Soften our hearts, O Lord, and let us be yielded to the Holy Spirit. God can plant His faith, His love in our hearts, and we will experience the peace of God which passes all understanding. He can do all that if we allow our hearts to be softened so He can work within us day by day by His Holy Spirit.

We read in the book of Acts of the early church having great unity. *"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common"* (Acts 4:32, KJV). In my Bible, I underlined that they were of one heart and one soul. We have unity by the work of the Holy Spirit, softening and changing our hearts, that we might be of one heart and one soul. God is changing us into His image, in the unity of the Body of Christ being brought together. As we allow our hearts to be softened, we have oneness in faith, trust and believing, and we together are one with Him.

Let us just have these things in our hearts as an encouragement. We should not be discouraged because we haven't reached 100 percent of what God has called us to yet. Day by day, little by little He is changing us. Step by step He is changing our hearts by each of those experiences we go through, as we are yielded to His Spirit. He is softening our hearts so that He can plant His faith, His love and His unity in our individual hearts that we can have oneness of heart as a body. He is giving us hearts that will believe and not doubt. We experience the comfort of the Holy Spirit and the peace of God that passes all understanding. Soften our hearts, O Lord, we pray. In Jesus Name. Amen. 

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Headquarters:
802 Airport Road
North Battleford, SK S9A 2Z3 Canada

Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 934
North Battleford, SK S9A 2Z3 Canada

Telephone:
(306) 445-2733

Email:
info@globalmissionsinc.org

Online:
www.globalmissionsinc.org

Traveling Ministry Contact List:
www.globalmissionsinc.org/about

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