

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

56. What We Focus on Matters

You are listening to episode 56 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast, titled "What We Focus On Matters." Welcome back to the podcast today. It's a joy to have you join me. Today we're diving into the subject of focus, more specifically, the object of our focus. Throughout our day, what do we focus on? Our problems or solutions? The inconvenience of rain or its gift of watering the earth? Is our attention on God or the many distractions preventing us spending time with Him? Yes, what we focus on does matter. Join me for the next short while and we'll explore this together. As always, we'll find help and hope as we go. Let's get to it.

The other morning as I was making my first cup of hot tea for the day, it began. The annoying chirping of a hidden cricket. In our home! Chirp, chirp, chirp. This is the season when a random cricket or two will somehow make its way into our home. Yeah, I know. It's awful, and I fully believe crickets are disgusting insects. And they do not belong in the house (or in my opinion, anywhere else, for that matter). But this happens every year, living out here in rural Iowa. And I go hunting each time until I find it.

Chirp, chirp, chirp.

I followed its annoying call. It grew louder as I approached the air vent on the floor in our dining room. I lifted off the top, fully expecting to see the chirping culprit, but to my surprise, no cricket. But the chirping continued. The sound came from the depths of the air duct. Somehow the cricket was down in the duct, somewhere!

Chirp, chirp, chirp. I stood there for a moment, wondering how on earth I would get the cricket and stop its annoying call. But I soon realized there was no way I was going to locate him. So, I would just ignore the chirping and go on with my day. (Even though the thought of a cricket loose in our house crept me out.) But what could I do?

So, I made my tea. Chirp, chirp, chirp. I made breakfast. Chirp, chirp, chirp. I ate my breakfast. Chirp, chirp, chirp. All I could hear was that annoying cricket! I tried to ignore him, but I couldn't! I tried to focus on my tea, on making my food, and enjoying my breakfast. But I couldn't! All I could focus on was that annoying cricket! It was driving me bonkers! Chirp, chirp, chirp.

If you've ever experienced the annoyance of a chirping cricket, then you know exactly what I'm talking about. It's loud, it's obnoxious, it's never ending. You just want it to stop and go away. The only thing worse it two crickets chirping at the same time!

So, I did what any of us would do.

I picked up my plate and tea and moved to my office where it was nice and quiet. No cricket. No sound. Just me and my breakfast.

(You're waiting for me to say there was another cricket in my office, aren't you? Well, thankfully there wasn't. At least not on this day. There was the next day, though. But I was able to locate that one and stop the chirping.)

This experience was a perfect object lesson for me.

What we focus on matters.

"Your life is controlled by what you focus on." -Tony Robbins

And that small annoying cricket was controlling my life because he was all I could focus on. So much so, I had to move.

But I guess sometimes that's what we have to do. Move. Both literally and figuratively.

"Instead of focusing on the circumstances that you cannot change – focus strongly and powerfully on the circumstances that you can." -Joy Page

I could change my circumstances, so I did. Even though the cricket kept chirping, I couldn't hear him. And I enjoyed my breakfast in spite of him.

Yes, it matters what we focus our attention on.

Every day of our lives we have a choice. On what will be our focus?

We have a choice to focus on:

- the positive or the negative.
- the good or the bad.
- what's important or what's trivial.
- what matters in eternity or what matters today.
- the blessings or the curses.
- the joys or the sorrows.
- God and His will or ourselves and our wills.
- the solutions or our problems.
- what worked or what didn't work.
- feeling healthy or the aches and pains.
- forgiveness or unforgiveness.
- God's peace or the world's chaos.
- dreams and goals or past mistakes.
- what we get to do or what we have to do.

- God Word or the words of others.
- grace or condemnation.
- hope or hopelessness.
- trust or doubt.
- life or death.

What we focus on matters.

You will keep perfectly peaceful the one whose mind remains focused on you, because he remains in you. Isaiah 26:3 ISV (International Standard Version)

I am reminded of the account in the book of Numbers, chapter 13, where Moses sent twelve men to explore the land of Canaan, the land God promised the Israelites. There they found giant men and giant fruit. The cluster of grapes they found was so big, it had to be carried on a pole, lifted by two men. But when they returned with their report after 40 days, ten of the men focused on the giants, and two men, Caleb and Joshua, focused on the fruit. The ten men said that the giants were too big and the Israelites were too small, like grasshoppers. They focused on others and themselves. On the other hand, Caleb and Joshua focused on their God.

"If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them."
Numbers 14:8-9 NIV

What about us? What is our focus on?

Do we focus on what we can do, or what God can do?

Do we focus on the size of others, the size of the obstacles in our lives, the size of the messes we've made? Or do we focus on the size of our God?

It makes a big difference. It does for us and it did for the Israelites. Because of the ten explorers' unfavorable report, a rebellion ensued. God struck down the ten with a plague because of their disobedience, and for the next 40 years the Israelites were forced to wander in the desert before ever stepping foot in Canaan. Of all the Israelites 20 years old or older at that time, only Caleb and Joshua were allowed to see the Promised Land after the 40-year wandering.

If the the ten men would have focused on God instead, I wonder how different the story would have been? It's likely the rebellion wouldn't have occurred. It's likely the Israelites would have acquired the Promised Land 40 years earlier, and it's likely all would have been a part of watching God work in giving them the land. But who knows?

This can be a lesson for us all.

It does matter what we focus on. Will we focus on the size of the giants or the size of the grapes? Will we focus on the size of our problems or the size of our God?

Let's take a hard look at our focus today.

Is God the center of our attention or is something else?

If it's something else, what can we do to switch it back to God?

Well, we can say a simple prayer. Each day I offer a "Today's Simple Prayer" on Instagram that you can adapt for yourself.

We can read scripture. If you're on the go today and don't have your Bible with you, do a search for "Bible verses to focus on God," or find the YouVersion Bible app.

We can pause whatever we're doing and bring our thoughts back to God. Praise Him for who He is.

We can take a breath, look around us, and thank God for the things/people/places we see. There's so many!

We can whisper Jesus' name. Or better yet, repeat it a few times. Even silently in our heads is great.

We can write ourselves a note and stick it to our mirror, our fridge, our computer, our car's dashboard to remind us to focus on God.

What did I miss? What do you do to keep your attention focused on God?

It doesn't take much to get our focus back on track.

And each of these things work. Find one that's best for you.

Set your mind *and* keep focused *habitually* on the things above [the heavenly things], not on things that are on the earth [which have only temporal value]. Colossians 3:2 AMP

The more we do this, the easier it becomes. Like the scripture reads, it will become a habit. And what a great habit to have!

So back to the cricket.

When I went back to the dining room, the chirping had stopped. Either Mr. Cricket moved or decided to be silent. I pray we have no more cricket incidences this late summer, but if we do, I'm going to apply what I'm learning and what God is teaching me. What I focus on matters.

We're taking this discussion over to our Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. Come on over and join the conversation. You'll find this space encouraging and uplifting, without a bunch of fluff and hype. Just real women connecting through God's leading. The link is in the show notes.

If you found some encouragement and hope here today, I invite you to rate and/or review this episode so others can find it too. It blesses me to read what you have to say about the podcast! Be sure to subscribe so you never miss an episode.

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I'll close with this quote by Peter McWilliams, "Our thoughts create our reality – where we put our focus is the direction we tend to go." May we go in God's direction and may He be our reality every single day. I'm praying for us all in this today. What we focus on matters. Thank you for joining me today. God bless you!

Julie Lefebvre