

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

163. Do We Focus on Earthly or Heavenly Things?

We've talked before about how our focus matters, right? So, what exactly are we focused on these days? We probably don't go through our days thinking about our focus, but maybe we should. Maybe it would be wise of us to pause every now and then to take a look and to ask ourselves some questions. Such as: are we focused on earthly or heavenly things? Temporary or eternal things? It all matters. Well today we are doing just that in this episode, and I believe it will help align our perspective on life a little closer to God's. So, if you're ready for an updated, positive perspective, I invite you hang out with me here and we'll find hope and encouragement for our real lives today.

In last week's episode (you can find it in the show notes) I shared with you how I prepared myself to stay fully present for our son's wedding on August 31. But what I didn't share with you was how a distraction came into play two weeks before the wedding. This distraction nearly got the best of me, and it had nothing to do with Zach and Paige getting married but had everything to do with the dress I was planning to wear for their wedding.

I had shown a picture of the dress to a few people who asked about it in advance, and only a couple people saw it in person. Each one had their own opinion of the dress. Most of them were encouraging and positive, but some weren't. The comments of, "Oh, wow, that's not a typical mother of the groom dress," and "Mothers of the groom normally wear beige," caused me question my choice. Sadly, I allowed these comments to affect me. I began to second-guess my dress. *Should I find another one?*

My dress was clearly not beige and it definitely was not the typical mother of the groom dress.

The bodice was black, fitted, and the front and back were both V-necks. The skirt of the dress had an organza overlay of big gold flowers. This may sound gaudy, I realize, but the image of it online caught my attention. So much so, I ordered it last fall on clearance for \$75 dollars from Macy's. I love a good bargain! It was the same brand of dress I wore to our daughter's wedding, and I loved that one. So, I ordered the same size. Happily, when it arrived, it fit perfectly. It had been hanging in my closet ever since--for ten months.

But now, with just two weeks before the wedding, I was questioning it. *Should I run somewhere and find a new dress? I don't want to be that kind of mother of the groom that stands out too much. Mothers of the groom are supposed to blend in and keep their mouths shut. At least that's what I read in repeated places. What do I do?*

I shared with a wise friend my dilemma, and she gave me some much-appreciated advice. She basically told me that I was putting more stress on me than I needed to. That I should wear whatever dress I wanted to, providing it was okay with the bride--and it was. And then she said something like this, "Your

dress doesn't have anything to do with Zach and Paige starting their married life together. That's eternal. Your dress is not."

Bam!

I was focusing on what was temporary, and not on what was eternal.

I do that often. Do you?

In my book, *Right Now Matters*, I share a story in Chapter 10 of my high school track days, and how I loved running the hurdles. To effectively clear a hurdle without losing speed, I learned early on that my focus mattered. If I focused on the hurdle, I would hit it every time. So I learned to set my focus just above and beyond the hurdle.

At one meet, however, a certain hurdle caught my eye. My focus centered straight on it. Can you guess what happened? Instead of clearing the hurdle with ease, my leading foot hit it dead-on. I tumbled forward, landing on the cinder block track with the hurdle underneath me.

Let's pause for a moment and picture that scene in our minds. I can still show you the scars on my knees and elbows to prove it.

Yes, what we focus on matters.

This reminds me of two Scriptures. The first one is about earthly and heavenly things, and what we are to focus on. It's Colossians 3:2. It says, "Stay focused on what's above, not on earthly things" (Voice).

Some versions call "what's above," "heavenly things." The heavenly things are the things of God and His will. They are spiritual things such as love, peace, and joy. The earthly things, however, are tangible and material things. Things like money, status, jobs, problems, and physical stuff.

The second Scripture reminds us what will last forever and what will not. It's 2 Corinthians 4:18, and in the NLT it reads, "So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever."

I was so fixated on the earthly thing of my dress that I was missing the what was above, the heavenly thing, of why I was wearing the dress in the first place--Zach and Paige's wedding.

I needed to change my perspective and my focus. Otherwise, I might find myself once again sprawled out on the cinder block track of life with a hurdle underneath me. And I certainly didn't want to relive that experience again.

I've been asking myself this question often ever since:

What am I focused on, earthly or heavenly things?

We take this question deeper on Day 19 of the *Right Now Matters Bible Study*. We brainstorm what's earthly and what's heavenly in our lives. What comes to your mind when you think of earthly or heavenly things? The heavenly things I listed on that day of the Bible the last time I walked through the

study were: Jesus, love, peace, God's Word, joy, fruits of the Spirit, and prayer. But there are so many more as I think on them today. The earthly things were: my wants, clothing, stuff, trivial things, things that will pass away, things that don't affect eternity in any sort of way. I invite you to pause and ponder these in your life, too.

What's the heavenly things you're focused on today? What are the earthly ones? What do we focus on the most?

Colossians 3:2, which I just read a minute ago, reminds us what God desires for us to focus on--the heavenly things. These are what matters.

We continue further on this subject on Day 20 of the *Right Now Matters Bible Study*. We complete a short exercise which helps us see what we are most focused on during our days. I'll try to describe it. Take a piece of paper and on it, make a list of everything you focus on in a day. I know that's a tall order but write down as many as you can think of such as your prayer time, your family time, making meals, appointments, work, your time on social media, everything.

Then draw a target on your paper. Not the store, but a target with circles. In the smallest circle, write GOD in the center. Then begin to write in the items you wrote on your list. Put the most crucial ones--it's possible these are the heavenly ones--near the center of God's bullseye. Write the least important ones--maybe these are the earthly things--toward the outside of our target. Sometimes comparing what's heavenly and what's earthly in this exercise helps us prioritize our time and our focus. If you can't do this exercise now, mark the timestamp of this episode and return to it later. Walking through this exercise every month or so helps me keep me focused on what's important.

When we focus on the heavenly things, we stay in God's will, functioning in His strength.

We are vessels for His good and His glory.

Life on this earth, however, isn't geared toward the heavenly things or the things of God. It tends to point us to the earthly things. I understand how some days it's not so easy to stand against this oppressive influence. But if we do what Romans 12:2 suggests, we'll be better able to stay in tune with what God desires for us and less distracted by what the world says is good for us.

Romans 12:2a in The Message paraphrase says, "Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out."

When we fix our attention on God, we will naturally be focused on the things of Him--the heavenly things and the things that matter.

How do we do this?

We can fix our attention on God by praying and having real conversations with God.

We can open our Bibles or our Bible apps and read them.

And we can participate in Bible studies or spend time with others who point us to God.

We can set reminders on our phones to prompt us to focus on God throughout the day.

We can also get involved in our churches, or attend a church service, or talk with others about what God is doing in our lives.

There are many things we can do to fix our attention on God. How do you do this, or what are you prompted to do after hearing these ideas? And not that we want to do this just once a day, but to fix our attention on God throughout the day.

Most importantly, the heavenly things matter in heaven. That makes sense, doesn't it? The earthly things will not. The heavenly things will last forever, and we'll take those in to eternity with us. But the earthly things, we cannot. There's not one earthly thing we can take with us. Not one. So why do so many put such an emphasis on this stuff? Because we lose sight of the heavenly things.

As Matthew 6:19-21 (NLT) states, "Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be."

May our treasure be found in heaven.

What will we focus on today, the earthly or heavenly things? The things that will pass away or the things that will last forever? The things that are temporary or the things that are eternal? It's easy to focus on what's earthly, and it takes dedicated effort to focus on the heavenly. But the payoff will be worth it.

After my realization that I was focused on the earthly thing of my mother of the groom dress instead of the heavenly thing of Zach and Paige's marriage, God used this to help me understand what's truly important in my life. I believe it made a big impact for me on their wedding day also. I understand because I live in this world that entices us to focus on the earthly things around us, I may continue to struggle with this on this side of eternity. But I'm now aware and can change my focus on the heavenly things in this life.

If you'd like to dig deeper into the heavenly things in this life, I invite you to join me for our next Right Now Matters Bible Study group sessions. The dates are set, and they begin the first full week in October-- one session is online on Zoom on Monday evenings and the other session is in-person Friday afternoons in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. These are free to attend, but you will want to purchase the book and Bible study to get the most out of your study. Even if you've walked through the study before, you are welcome to join us for a refresher! I can't wait to study God's Word with you!

If you found some hope and encouragement in today's episode, would you please consider leaving a rating or review from wherever you're listening today? Forward this episode to a friend who could use some encouragement in her life. If you haven't already, subscribe so you never miss a new episode.

Life is better when we focus on the things of God.

It's not perfect, but it's much better than when we focus on the things of this world. Friend, I pray you join me on this endeavor. When it comes to the earthly and heavenly things that are in front of us on any

given day, I pray you and I continue to grow in our faith in Jesus to immerse ourselves in His will and ways and not this world's. May God be glorified in it all. I'm cheering you on today! God bless you!

Links in this episode:

Episode 162, How to Stay Fully Present on Memorable Days

[Learn more about my books, *Right Now Matters* and the *Right Now Matters Bible Study*](#)

[2 Corinthians 4:18](#) NLT

[Colossians 3:2](#) VOICE

[Romans 12:2](#) MSG

[Matthew 6:19-21](#) NLT

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