

Series: Unforgettable Halftime Moments
Halftime Focus #6
John 21:19b-25

Opening: Jn. 21:19b-25 *"Then he said to him, "Follow me!"*

20Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") 21When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

22Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." 23Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"

24This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. 25Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. **PRAYER**

INTRODUCTION: Sports Illustrated called it: 'The single most incredible moment in all sports history, that sent the entire nation into a frenzy.'

The speech coach Herb Brooks gave to the U.S. men's national hockey team prior to their semi-final game against the USSR in the 1980 Olympics is one of the greatest locker room speeches of all time.

"Great moments are born from great opportunity. And that's what you have here tonight. That's what you've earned here, tonight. One game. If we played 'em 10 times, they might win nine. But not this game. Not tonight. Tonight, we skate with 'em. Tonight, we stay with 'em, and we shut them down because we can! Tonight, we are the greatest hockey team in the world. You were born to be hockey players-every one of ya. And you were meant to be here tonight. This is your time. Their time-is done. It's over. I'm sick and tired of hearin' about what a great hockey team the Soviets have...This is your time!!

In that 1980 US vs. Russia hockey game. The score is 4 to 3 with the US in the lead. All they must do is hold off the Russians for the final few minutes and they win. As time is running out, you'll hear announcer Al Michaels utter one of the most famous sayings in sports history: **'Do you believe in miracles?'**

Coach Brooks was attempting to sharpen his team's focus away from the distractions of the national TV audience, the pressure of the Olympic expectations, and the skill of their opponents. They focused, and they won.

The sermon series we've been looking at for the last six weeks is entitled **'Unforgettable Halftime Moments.'** So far, we've looked at halftime action, service, fellowship, love, and faithfulness. Like a coach with his team, Jesus huddles with his disciples by the Sea of Galilee to re-emphasize the fundamentals. As the "huddle" is about to break, and the disciples are about to see Jesus ascend to heaven and then wait in Jerusalem to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, Jesus reminds Peter to stay **focused** and keep his head in the game. [Little League example?] **The title of today's message is: "Halftime Focus"**

The questions for us today are: Where is our focus right now? Is our head in the game, spiritually speaking? What should we focus on as Christ-followers?

In today's fast-paced world, distractions lurk around every corner, from social media notifications to the never-ending flood of information. It has become increasingly challenging to stay focused on the tasks at hand. Yet, the ability to focus is one of the most powerful skills anyone can possess.

One well-known study, often referred to as the "invisible gorilla experiment" (Simons & Chabris, 1999), asked participants to count basketball passes while a person in a gorilla suit walked through the scene. Remarkably, about half the participants didn't even notice the gorilla because their attention was so focused on counting passes. **The takeaway:** We miss much of what happens around us simply because our attention is elsewhere.

Illustration: Focusing is a powerful concept. Diffused light is easily blocked but if you focus that light into a laser, it can cut through steel. Water splashes off rock but if you focus that water with pressure through a nozzle, it can blast through granite.

Illustration: The great golfer Arnold Palmer recalled the final hole of the 1961 Masters tournament. He told of how he had a one stroke lead and had just hit a very satisfying tee shot. He felt he was in pretty good shape. As he approached his ball, he saw an old friend standing at the edge of the gallery. He motioned Palmer over, stuck out his hand and said, "Congratulations."

Palmer took his hand and shook it, but as soon as he did, he knew he had lost his focus. On his next two shots, he hit the ball into a sand trap and then put it over the edge of the green. He missed a putt and lost the Masters. Palmer said, "You don't forget a mistake like that; you just learn from it and become determined that you will never let anything distract you again."

How easy it is to become distracted in the Christian life. With all the attractions, allurements, and interruptions this world throws at us every day, if we're not careful, it doesn't take long for us to lose our focus.

Illustration: In the classic movie, *City Slickers*, a group of middle-aged executives, are going through a midlife crisis. So, these guys decide to go on an adventure of a lifetime, a trail ride. They're going to be pretend cowboys for a couple of weeks, pushing cattle to the prairie out west, and their guide is a grizzled, old real cowboy by the name of Curly.

There's one scene in the movie where Curly says, as they're driving cattle, 'Do you know what the secret of life is?' And Mitch, one of the pretend cowboys played by Billy Crystal says, 'What's the secret of life?' And all the guys are just anticipating what the secret of life is, and Curly holds up one finger and he says, 'This.' And Mitch says, 'Your finger is the secret of life?' And he says, 'One thing. Stick to that one thing and nothing else matters.' And then Mitch says, 'What's that one thing?' And Curly says, 'You've got to figure that out.'

You've got to figure out what the one thing is that changes everything and narrow your focus to the one thing, and then you'll be hitting the bullseye.

The Bible tells us the secret is not a life of multitasking but focus. The more you narrow your focus, the more you broaden your life; and the result is: ***"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be given to you as well." [Matthew 6:33, NIV]***

Considering Jesus' conversation with Peter, here is where we need to focus:

I. FOCUS ON JESUS' PLAN FOR YOU

No sooner had Peter been challenged by Jesus' plan for his life, then Peter is distracted with thoughts of Jesus' plans for somebody else. "Peter, feed my lambs, take care of my sheep, feed my sheep, glorify God in your death, and follow me. Do you understand?" "Yes, Lord!"

The book of Acts tells us of the history of the early church from its beginning at Pentecost in Jerusalem to its growth and expansion over a period of several decades. Peter is the central character and most influential leader in the first half of that book because he learned to focus his energy and attention on the Lord's plan for his life.

We see evidence that Peter learned this lesson in his interactions with the Apostle Paul. Peter had initially directed his evangelistic efforts on Jewish people. When Paul came along, he was focused on the Gentiles. Different guy, same gospel mission, but different plan. And as time passed, the leadership momentum seemed to shift Paul's way. Was Peter envious of that? Was he distracted by that? No. Notice Paul's take on it in his letter to the Galatians.

Galatians 2:7-9 Instead, they saw that God had given me the responsibility of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as he had given Peter the responsibility of preaching to the Jews. 8For the same God who worked through Peter as the apostle to the Jews also worked through me as the apostle to the Gentiles. 9In fact, James, Peter, and John, who were known as pillars of the church, recognized the gift God had given me, and they accepted Barnabas and me as their co-workers. They encouraged us to keep preaching to the Gentiles, while they continued their work with the Jews." [NLT]

We can see from what Paul wrote that Peter is no longer in 'What about that guy' mode. Peter's fine with God using Paul as a missionary to the Gentiles and God using Peter as a missionary to the Jews.

II. DON'T FOCUS ON OTHERS AROUND YOU

I have been pointing out the kindness of God shown through how gently the Lord

restores Peter. Peter had messed up big time, denied the Lord, but Jesus did not come to rub it in, but to rub it out.

But right now, I notice—and see how often this can be true of any one of us, that as soon as Peter sets off again after his reconciliation, he trips up in what he says and does.

Jesus promised to take Peter and make him something he was not at the time of his calling. He was a fisherman. But as he followed Jesus, he would become a fisher of men.

That's all we must do to get started—follow. All we must do to keep going through the valleys and mountains we face—follow. All we must do to finish—follow. One step at a time. You get started by following. You get to the end by following.

But look at how Peter trips up again! And he's only gone a few steps. The Lord started walking away down the beach, he's going, leading in a new direction now. Peter has just been fully reconciled, restored, and reinstated for service by Jesus. From fisher of men, to tender and feeder of sheep. Surely his mind is spinning as he tries to process some of what the Lord rather obliquely told him his future looked like—it seemed a little scary—but right now, all Peter must do, is focus on Jesus and follow Him.

So, Peter follows, for at least a step or two. But look at verse 20 it says, ***“Then Peter - turning around ... (NKJV).”***

What? The word in the original language indicates an abrupt change of direction, even a turning back. ***“Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following ...”***

How often do we lose our stride by focusing on others?

In her book Atlas of the Heart, Brené Brown writes about how much she loves lane swimming at the pool, unless her attention drifts to the lanes next to her. Then she finds she's trying to catch up with someone or wondering if her stroke is better or worse. I think we've all been there and I don't just mean when we are swimming. It can happen with finances, work, recognition, relationships.

Mark Twain said, "Comparison is the death of joy, because comparison robs you of contentment."

Whether you stop counting your own blessings and compare your weight, wealth or work. When you see somebody else's house, spouse, or blouse - and it doesn't matter if you feel they rate up or down, negatively or positively, because either smug pride or envious inferiority will leave you feeling bad.

Brown goes in to describe comparison as simultaneously "trying to fit in and stand out." No wonder it's hard. That's true whether we are comparing ourselves against someone we perceive as better or worse. Her studies show that "in the end, comparing ourselves to others leads to fear, anger, shame, and sadness."

Now Peter turned from just following Jesus and started to look at someone else who was also a follower, the one who chose to include this incident of yet another of Peter's failures out of all the things he could have written about.

Peter's stride is broken, and he loses focus when he takes his eyes off Jesus. This time it was not because he was looking at the wind and the waves, it's because he stopped looking at Jesus and looked at John instead.

So now "Peter seeing John said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about this man?'" Do you love him more than me? What is going to happen with him?"

Jesus says, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!"

Notice Jesus is not saying John will stay alive until the second coming. History shows that he died in exile on the Isle of Patmos. Jesus is not saying John wouldn't die. He's telling Peter, it's not your business. Never mind him. "You – follow me!" Literally it reads "Keep on following me."

Think about Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, Linked In, and so many others. The push for many on social media is to count, "How many are following me?" Meanwhile the Lord of the universe stops us in our tracks, looks us straight in the eye and says, "How closely are you focused and following me?"

Don't compare yourself with anyone else because God made everyone different. Look at your fingerprint. God made each one of us unique. Nobody else can be you." Just because Jesus loves John does not mean he has any less love for Peter. We don't need to worry what Jesus is doing to or through somebody else. Just follow Jesus!

God is never going to ask, "Why were you not more like him or her?" He is molding us to be more like Jesus and that happens when we focus on Jesus.

Just as the Lord's plan for Peter was different than the Lord's plan for Paul. His plan for you is different than his plan for others. When we understand that, it frees us from getting distracted by playing the comparison game.

Focus on Jesus' Plan for you, don't focus on others around you...

III. FOCUS ON JESUS' SPIRIT IN YOU - Vs. 22

"Jesus answered, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.' "

Peter was getting distracted by things he was not meant to know. In this case he was focusing on the destiny of John, instead of God's plan for his life. Jesus said he wasn't meant to know John's destiny.

Luke tells us in Acts 1:6-7 that the disciples asked Jesus after his resurrection "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? " And Jesus answered "It's not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority" That's not for you to know. The disciples were easily distracted by questions and issues that, while interesting, were not essential or helpful.

It's what Neal Maxwell calls getting ***"caught up in the thick of thin things"*** When the disciples got caught up in the thick of thin things the result was diluted focus taken from their main priority which was FOLLOWING Jesus.

II Corinthians 3:18 "So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more

and more like him as we are changed into His glorious image.”

As we follow Jesus, think about Jesus, contemplate Jesus, imitate Jesus, and obey Jesus, our character is being transformed into the character of Jesus. Change is hard. It's easy to see where everyone else needs to change.

It's a lot more challenging to submit to God's will in allowing ourselves to be changed. Following Jesus takes a lot of time, energy and FOCUS. Don't get distracted by lesser things. We can't get caught up in the thick of thin things.

As a leader in the Lord's church, it was more important to Jesus that Peter have Christ-like CHARACTER than having the answer to every question.

There were a lot of things that Peter didn't know but he followed Jesus.

- Peter did not know John's destiny.
- Peter didn't know when Jesus was returning.

But Peter knew the basic, uncomplicated, straightforward gospel and he preached it to thousands with great effect. Because of his character Peter was recognized as a man who had been with Jesus. Peter's character had been transformed by following Jesus. Peter had tremendous influence. I don't advocate Biblical ignorance, but I DO believe that discipleship is more than knowing answers to every question...it's also Holy Spirit filled, Christ-like character, evidenced by the fruit of the Spirit.

Jesus is in the soul-saving business and the character-changing business...he's not in the "answer-man "business. It's not wrong to ask questions. But it is a mistake to think that God owes us explanations about everyone and everything.

People sometimes allow unanswered questions to distract them from the importance of discipleship which is FOLLOWING Jesus. One of the most important realizations that we can come to is the realization that there are some questions, and even in the Bible, to which we will never know the answers, in this life.

In his first letter Peter wrote about the prophets who wrote the Old Testament scriptures. They had questions and they didn't always get answers. Some of the

very things they were writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit were things they themselves didn't understand because they were meant for future generations.

I Pt.1:10-12 "This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you."

Some people get very distracted by spiritual topics that are somewhat obscure in the Bible. Things like visions/dreams, end-time scenarios, angels, apocalyptic prophecy, numerology, the anti-Christ, and nearly everything in the book of Revelation.

Is everything in the Bible important? Yes. But not to the same degree and not for the same reasons (Luke 11:42). Is everything in the Bible worth reading and studying? Yes. But Jesus warns not to neglect the "more important" things like justice and the love of God. That means that some things in the Bible are more important than others. And frankly, some things are clearer than others. And most of the important things are abundantly clear. 'Love the Lord with all you heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.' That doesn't require a Bible college degree.

Focus Reduces Stress

Focus Fosters Success

Focus Increases Power

IV. FOCUS ON JESUS' SOVEREIGNTY SURROUNDING YOU

"Jesus answered, 'If I want him to remain alive...'

This verse oozes with the SOUVERIGNTY of Jesus. Peter wants to know if John is going to suffer the same fate as Peter. "I must die a martyr's death, what about him?" Jesus answers ***"If I want."*** It's all according to what Jesus wants. JESUS is in control of John's life and death, and he doesn't need Peter's help in working all of that out.

We don't know why people die when they do and how they do. To us, it often makes little sense. Most of you have lost loved ones in what we would call 'untimely' deaths. And you think, "Why, God? That doesn't make sense.'

Our struggle is reflected in the 73rd Psalms.

**1 Truly God is good to Israel,
to those whose hearts are pure.
2 But as for me, I almost lost my footing.
My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone.
3 For I envied the proud
when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness.
4 They seem to live such painless lives;
their bodies are so healthy and strong.
5 They don't have troubles like other people;
they're not plagued with problems like everyone else.
6 They wear pride like a jeweled necklace
and clothe themselves with cruelty.
7 These fat cats have everything
their hearts could ever wish for!
8 They scoff and speak only evil;
in their pride they seek to crush others.
9 They boast against the very heavens,
and their words strut throughout the earth.
10 And so the people are dismayed and confused,
drinking in all their words.
11 "What does God know?" they ask.
"Does the Most High even know what's happening?"
12 Look at these wicked people—
enjoying a life of ease while their riches multiply.
13 Did I keep my heart pure for nothing?
Did I keep myself innocent for no reason?
14 I get nothing but trouble all day long;
every morning brings me pain.
15 If I had really spoken this way to others,
I would have been a traitor to your people.
16 So I tried to understand why the wicked prosper.
But what a difficult task it is!
17 Then I went into your sanctuary, O God,
and I finally understood the destiny of the wicked.**

*18 Truly, you put them on a slippery path
and send them sliding over the cliff to destruction.
19 In an instant they are destroyed,
completely swept away by terrors.
20 When you arise, O Lord,
you will laugh at their silly ideas
as a person laughs at dreams in the morning.
21 Then I realized that my heart was bitter,
and I was all torn up inside.
22 I was so foolish and ignorant—
I must have seemed like a senseless animal to you.
23 Yet I still belong to you;
you hold my right hand.
24 You guide me with your counsel,
leading me to a glorious destiny.
25 Whom have I in heaven but you?
I desire you more than anything on earth.
26 My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak,
but God remains the strength of my heart;
he is mine forever.
27 Those who desert him will perish,
for you destroy those who abandon you.
28 But as for me, how good it is to be near God!
I have made the Sovereign Lord my shelter,
and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do. [NLT]*

The point here is to trust in the sovereign love, goodness and control of God. Do not allow death, despair, or disillusionment to distract you from your focus, which is following Jesus.

In the end, John died; AND Peter died. All the disciples by the Sea of Galilee that day eventually died. What WAS important was that because they followed Jesus, they turned the world upside down.

That's why Jesus says to Peter, 'What is that to you? You follow me.'

So, in your focus:

1. Rest in the Father's **Care!**
2. Respond to the Father's **Command!**
3. Rely on the Father's **Control!**

V. FINE TUNE YOUR FOCUS ON CHRIST EVERY DAY

George Orwell said this about living with focus: ***"To see what is front of one's nose needs a constant struggle."***

King Solomon gave us the following guideline: ***'Let your eyes look straight ahead, and fix your gaze directly before you.'*** (Proverbs 4:25)

Paul says this: ***"... Inwardly we are being renewed day by day."*** (4:16) It was important for Paul to know that the fine-tuning of his faith would be a daily process.

Racing teams on the NASCAR circuit have precision-laced pit crews that change tires, refuel their cars, and make tiny adjustments in less than 15 seconds multiple times a race. During the race, the goal would never be to re-build or replace an engine, but rather, to fine-tune the car.

Piano tuners don't have to re-build the shell of the instrument to make great music. Instead, they take painstaking trouble to return each note to its optimum sound.

Periodic updates on your computer won't recreate your hard drive. Instead, they add to or change minute portions of your existing computer programs on a regular basis.

And of course, a pilot doesn't attach new wings during flight. Instead, the course corrections will be made in very small, safe increments.

In all cases, fine-tuning deals with what is already there. The good news for someone dissatisfied with his or her own faith experience, is you don't have to rebuild your entire faith, just fine tune your focus.

A good example is a piano tuner working in solitude, straining in a quiet room to

hear the purity of each note. Or perhaps it's the surprising reflection found in a sweaty locker room, as a team refocuses on the job ahead.

And perhaps that's one of the most important concepts of fine-tuning. This process requires a bit of time, some space, and a safe place for reflection.

Before returning to Egypt for his "second half," Moses was "fined tuned" with a 40-year sabbatical. He had no idea that God was using those 40 years to prepare him for the last, and most important season of his life.

Jesus often withdrew to the quiet places, for the specific purposes of prayer and reflection. Paul took three years to reflect upon a new theology after his salvation experience near Damascus (see Galatians 1:18).

Whether you're at a literal halfway point in your life, or whether you're just feeling a need to reflect upon your "second half," the same practices would be of immense value. Find some space, take some time, and ask big questions about your life's significance. And when you find the answer, you'll have all the motivation you need to play your heart out and focus, in the second half.

CONCLUSION: The Apostle Paul understood the importance of focus when he said, *"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."* He knew that the Christian life is a race, and that to win, we must keep our eyes on the prize: the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

STORY: Horatio Spafford was born in 1828. He became a baron in the real estate industry and a man of great wealth. Yet, through all his success, he never forgot that it was the hand of God which had blessed Him, and he gave God all the glory.

He lived in Chicago, and during the Great Chicago fire of 1871, Horatio Spafford lost it all. He not only lost his business, but also their only son.

His wife came almost to the point of depression over their loss of everything, so he put her, and their 4 daughters, on a ship heading for England. Spafford stayed behind in Chicago to handle a few business matters and would set out to meet them, in England, in 2 weeks.

However, somewhere near the middle of his family's voyage, the ship was struck

by an English vessel and sank in 12 minutes. All 4 of Spafford's daughters, Tanetta, Maggie, Annie and Bessie were among the 226 who drowned. Only his wife survived, and when she arrived in Cardiff, Wales, she sent him a telegram that read, "Saved Alone!"

Spafford jumped on board the next ship headed to England to be at the side of his wife. He sent word to the captain that when they arrived at the place where his daughters had drowned to come get him in his cabin and walk him to the deck.

Finally, they came to the spot where the boat had gone down, and Spafford walked up to the deck overlooking the icy waters of the North Atlantic, the very spot where his 4 daughters had perished.

As he stood there his mind was filled with doubt, confusion and turmoil. He had lost everything, his business, his son, and now his 4 daughters. However, during the darkest hour of his life, an overwhelming sense of peace flooded his soul, and he said that he knew, as never before, that God was in control, and would see him through.

Horatio Spafford went back to cabin sat down at his desk and penned these words to paper:

***When peace like a river
Attendeth my way.
When sorrows like sea billows roll.
Whatever my lot,
Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well; it is well, with my soul.***

The truth of those words has blessed the hearts of many troubled souls down through the years. So, as you focus remember:

God says, **"FRET not"**, because He LOVES us
God says, **"FAINT not"**, because He HOLDS us
God says, **"FEAR not"**, because He KEEPS us

Seek Him first, put Him first, keep Him first and you'll find that if He's God enough to provide for you in the sweet bye and bye, He's God enough to take care of you

in the right here and now.