



Learning To Stay On Course

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Pastor David Koch

Introduction:

Learning to stay on course; what gets us distracted? Every 13 minutes, there is a death caused by a motor vehicle accident. Auto accident statistics show that Americans from the ages of 1-33 are more likely to die from a car accident than from anything else. Most car accidents are entirely preventable. Recent auto accident statistics reveal that the drivers involved in accidents are most likely distracted, tired or possibly drunk. The National Highway Safety Traffic Administration reports that most drivers engage in activities that take their attention away from the road. These activities include:

- Talking with other passengers: 81%
- Playing with the radio or CD: 66%
- Eating or drinking: 49%
- Using a cell phone: 25%

Distractions come into our spiritual lives as well. We have one who is doing his best to distract us, to get us off course. We have to utilize whatever tools we have to stay focused, to stay on task, to keep our attention off the side things that would slow us down or get us to stop moving forward in our journey. Each of us is on a journey. The goal is to reach our final destination. Any person who has trained to run in a race deals with all kinds of distractions along the way. There is the distraction of weariness, the distraction of weather, the distraction of food, the distraction of other people who are training and the distraction of injuries. To finish well and strong means to hear, “Well done” at the end of the journey.

This morning we are going to talk about staying focused and dealing with the distractions that can derail us and get us sidetracked and off our course. **Hebrews 12:1-2 (ASV)** **Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

Each of us faces different things that distract us. These are things that grab our attention. They look alluring, exciting, intriguing, but in all reality, it is far more advantageous for us to stay on the course. Distractions can come as good things. Not every distraction is evil. Good things but not the best. Good things but not God's will. Sometimes the distraction is a temptation that is born out of our flesh, out of our weakness, or even our strength.

I cannot work around music. I lose my focus when I hear music. I begin to think of the key of the music and catch myself analyzing the chorale, melodic, harmonic and rhythmic structures of the music. Usually I become distracted when my attention becomes focused on things around me and I temporarily move my attention and focus from the task I'm involved with. That is how it works with me and I believe that is how it works with everyone. For me, distractions come quickly and it seems like my attention and focus is broken by them, no matter how small or short.

We have all been in conversations when something distracted us and for the moment of distraction, we lost our thought. I've had that happen and sometimes, I've never really been able to regain my place in the conversation. The natural realm around me can get me so focused on the things here, that I lose my spiritual focus and get sidetracked and lost. You might think that being distracted is not critical. However, in reality, allowing ourselves to be distracted puts us at tremendous risk even for death. Usually the distractions are small and may seem insignificant, but it is possible to get off course by being distracted and becoming a statistic.

What gets us off course?

I. The distraction of pride

Proverbs 16:18 (NLT)- Pride goes before destruction and haughtiness before a fall.

I have a general sense of direction – south, north, east and west. When going somewhere, I can know I need to be farther east of where I am, but I am uncertain of the roads to take to get there. I think at times that I don't need to get the perspective of my GPS, or of a map, or someone who knows the streets in the area, so my pride keeps me from gaining the reference of someone who knows. Could that tendency also be true spiritually? We hesitate to ask God. We make a turn, get messed up in knowing where we are and our pride gets in the way of seeking out God's path. At that point often we resist stopping in our journey, admitting we are lost and refocusing our attention on the goal.

II. The distraction of short cuts

There are times in our spiritual journey when we don't want to go through the experience that is ahead. When Julie and I travel to see her family, we have to travel through Chicago. I don't mind driving in big cities, but I would rather take a short cut and not have to deal with the traffic, the road construction, and all the crazy drivers in that city.

I once tried to take what I thought was a short cut, and we ended up on back roads, hopelessly lost. It took us several hours longer to get home than if we had just endured and traveled the route that we didn't like but would have taken us through the city.

Jesus also could have taken a short-cut right after His baptism, when he was tempted by Satan. His physical being craved sleep, food and comfort. It was in those areas that Satan tempted Him to get Him off course. He offered Him a short-cut to the path God had in mind and it would have deterred Him from fulfilling God's will.

This teaches us to resist the distraction of taking a short cut to circumvent some difficulty in trying to get to the destination and the goal.

III. The distraction of suffering

At times our spiritual journey takes us through a valley of discouragement or disappointment, through the valley of the shadow of death, through the valley of sickness, through the valley of heartache and brokenness. We may see those places ahead and do not want to travel through those areas. We get distracted by the thought that our way should be painless. If pain is involved, it can't be God's will. Life shouldn't be so difficult. We shouldn't suffer on this spiritual path if we are following Jesus.

Do you think Jesus endured some suffering as a man? He most definitely did. But he despised the shame and kept on the course that was set before Him. As our example, He did not allow the distractions around him to deter him. Even in the garden of Gethsemane, He prayed, "If it be possible let this cup pass from me, yet not my will, but your will be done." **Hebrews 5:8 (NLT)** **Even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered.** God can use difficult experiences by the path He chooses for us, to teach us surrender, obedience and reliance on Him. Do not become distracted by thinking your journey should or will be pain free.

IV. The distraction of own self-centered nature

Our flesh cries out for us to pursue money as a source of security. Our flesh cries out for us to pursue careers, promotions and prestige as a source of accomplishment. Our flesh cries out to be pampered, put first, entertained and catered to. The

nature of our flesh is sinful and battles against the spirit and God's nature. **1 John 2:16 (NLT)**- **For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world.**

These things can become snares and traps to get our attention diverted from staying the course that God has set before us. The distraction of our flesh and its nature are huge when it comes to being distracted. The only way to deal with the flesh and our sinful nature is to put it to death. Starve it, crucify it, kill it so it doesn't live and distract and control you. **Romans 8:12-13 (NLT)**- **Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live.**

V. The distraction of temptations

Jesus faced all the temptations that we do, yet He did not allow such things to deter His focus. There were tremendous temptations after He was baptized that could have derailed God's plan for Him. He resisted those temptations by the knowledge He had of the written word of God.

We also have the written word of God as a tool to battle and overcome the temptations that come our direction, whether they be from the flesh, the world around us or Satan, our foe. **1 Corinthians 10:13 (WEY)** **No temptation has you in its power but such as is common to human nature; and God is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength. But, when the temptation comes, He will also provide the way of escape; so that you may be able to bear it.**

Conclusion:

In this year, I challenge you to not let distractions get your focus off the goal. Don't let distractions keep you from where you are headed. Stay the course, keep your edge. You will finish strong if you keep on the course and do not get sidetracked. **Colossians 3:5 (NLT)**- **So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshipping the things of this world.**

