

How You Can Shift to a More Godly Focus in the New Year

Happy 2020! Welcome to a new year and a new decade!

And if you want this year to be better than last year, the most important place to begin is choosing your focus.

Research demonstrates that what you focus on becomes larger in your mind. Regardless of your circumstances, you get to choose what takes up most of the space and energy in your brain. For example, when people suffering with chronic illness or chronic pain focus on something funny, positive or even simply distracting, their sense of physical well-being increases and their pain decreases. Even prisoners of war were able to make it through with better resilience by choosing their focus.

That's a very biblical principle as well. You know about the Scripture where David "encouraged himself in the Lord" (1 Sam. 30:6b)? And Paul encourages us to think about things that are good and pure and lovely (Phil. 4:8, ESV), and to choose gratitude in all circumstances (1 Thess. 5:18).

This does not mean ignoring difficult circumstances! It does mean owning what is true, and then choosing where to put your focus next.

It's easy to find negative things to focus on; your lack of money or friends, your illness, the political or social divisions in our world or what other people are doing. If you struggle with this, let me suggest three helpful things to focus on as you begin this new year.

What You Can Do

And there is *always* something you can do.

You can't change what you weigh today. But you can change what

you weigh next month, and next year. You can change your behavior that results in a healthier body.

You can't change your spouse's behavior. But you can change your own thoughts, words, actions and responses. You can change the dance.

You can't change the kinds of people who have been in your life in the past. But you can change the community you connect with tomorrow.

Focusing on what you *can* do is empowering. You can handle much more stress than you ever imagined if you learn to focus on what you *can* do. The two-part prayer is powerful here; invite Jesus right into the middle of your stuff. And then ask Him to help you see what next step *you* are to take.

Things That Are Good

This is not mind over matter. Our minds are not all-powerful. But they are much more powerful than most of us realize. Positive thinking doesn't mean ignoring problems; it means continually bringing your focus back to what *is* good.

You will become like what you focus on. If the media you take in and the people you hang out with are miserable, ungodly and critical you'll become more like them. If the media you take in and the people you hang out with are growing, focused, healthy Jesus-followers, you'll become more and more like them also.

Like Paul said, choose to take into your mind things that are good, true, lovely and uplifting. (Phil. 4:8).

The Future

Sometimes you have to deal with your past before you can look to the future. That's important. But do it! Deal with your stuff and move forward.

Living in the past is like looking in the rear view mirror; you have to check it now and then, but don't focus there. The majority of your focus needs to be on the future.

The theology of hope is a helpful way of looking at the future. Because God lives outside of time, He knows exactly what your tomorrow holds. In fact, He's already there—in your tomorrow. It's as if He is standing there, reaching back to you and saying, "I'm already here in your tomorrow. I've checked it out, and it's OK. You can step into tomorrow knowing I'm here, waiting for you."

And then there's the ultimate tomorrow. As good as this life gets, it can never be enough, because God created you and me for eternity. Even Jesus had to keep His eyes on His future in order to make it: "who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2b, MEV).

You and I will have to keep our eyes on the future as well, both the future for 2020 and for eternity.

May you experience God's intervention powerfully this new year. And may 2020 be your best year ever!

Your turn: Where does your focus tend to naturally go? Now, what are you going to do in choosing your focus for 2020? Leave a comment below. {eo}

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