



Where Is Your Heart? How Is Your Life with God Going?

When I was young, in elementary school, I was told by the doctor that I needed glasses and so got a pair. I hated them though because of the way I looked wearing them, so I rarely used them. After about a year of this, I finally put them aside and abandoned them altogether. I didn't really feel any need for them, I could see well enough without them but when I started playing for my church softball team, I realized why I had been prescribed the glasses. We often played at night under the lights and when a flyball came to me in the outfield, I had a hard time catching it because the white ball was blurry against the blackened night sky. It was because I had astigmatism which made it impossible to see things in focus. Objects were blurry at night, and I had to work hard to see while driving. I started getting severe headaches because of the strain of trying to read. I have often experienced something similar in my daily life, where who I am becomes blurry, out of focus. Let me explain.

Often when we are struggling to concentrate on something, we say we are having a hard time focusing. This is a common problem for many of us. Perhaps you have found it difficult to focus on what someone is saying or a particular task that needs to be done. We all have encountered this issue at one time or another. Our mind is like a band of wild horses running all over the place and we have tried hard to rein it in and get it under control. An unfocused mind struggles to get things accomplished, reach important goals. This is especially true when it comes to our life with God. We are prone to drift from Him; especially when life gets comfortable, and things seem to be going well. There are numerous examples of this in the Bible. Everyone from Noah to Solomon lost their fervor for the Lord when the pressure was off, and they fell into a relaxed routine. It is easy to ignore this trending quality to our spiritual life; we may not even realize it has happened. Jesus referred to this as being "lukewarm" which sounds rather mundane on the surface but when you discover what Jesus' brother James said of this condition, you realize just how crucial it is for you to consider the ramifications of a "lukewarm" spiritual life.

James wrote, **You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.** (James 4: 4 NIV) Lukewarm at first glance seems to be a gentle drift from God but James makes it clear that it is far more than that. He calls it adultery and a hatred of God. There is a violence to this explanation; a deep corruption to it that jerks your head around when you hear it. I would consider it this way. Lukewarm and "hatred toward God" are the dichotomy of two perspectives. Lukewarm would be how you or I would view the condition. You just lost some of your fervor, you are a bit distracted, not as passionate about God as you once were. From the viewpoint of heaven, it is a catastrophic treachery. To grasp this better, consider the case of a married man who has sex with another woman. He might say he had an affair. The man's wife would say he cheated on her. He could label it an "indiscretion". She on the other hand would speak of it as a violation of the wedding vow and the destruction of the marriage. We take it much more lightly than does God Himself when we develop as James puts it a friendship with the world.

This is perhaps a topic that deserves three or four weeks to fully explore but we shall at least get at a part of what James is indicating about the skewed spirituality many practice. The term translated "friendship" is the

Greek word “phileo” and is often thought of as a love that is based on friendship, equal give and take. John the Apostle however, in describing this same condition uses the term “agapao” which is what we might say is unconditional love, some might think of it as deep love. Here is John’s take on this. **Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.** (1 John 2: 15-16 NIV) What trips up many on this is the use of the term “world” by both James and John. John 3:16 famously tells us that God loved the world so much that He gave His unique and one of a kind Son that whoever puts their faith in Him will not die forever but have eternal life. The difficulty lies in this. Although John 3: 16 as well as our passage in James and 1 John use the exact same word, “kosmos”, it can mean different things based on context. For Jesus, it spoke of all the people in the world. For James and John, it is a general term for everything in our lives that is in opposition to God and the Scriptures. Some would think of it as the world order that is anti-Christ. It seems best because of the connotations in that sort of language to consider it merely every part of our environment, whether it is individual people, or media or cultural practices that push us away from loyalty to the Lord.

It is difficult, and maybe even impossible for many to see this from the perspective of heaven. We are well-versed in the world’s take on things. Satan laid it out pretty clearly during the evil spirit’s temptations of Christ. Temptation one: You are hungry Jesus! Turn the stones into bread. Nothing wrong with that except that the Father sent Jesus out into the desert to fast and use that time to focus on their relationship. To end the fast prematurely would take Him from His close time with the Father. Temptation two: Satan brought Jesus to the highest part of the Temple and called for Jesus to throw Himself down from there and let the angels rescue Him from death. The chilling temptation was for Jesus to force the Father to rescue Him from disaster, thus driving a wedge between them. Jesus knew it was not God’s plan for Him to die by suicide. It was like thrill-seeking at the highest level. See what the Father does to save Him. Quite the adrenaline rush as He plummets toward the ground. Temptation three: Bow down and worship Satan and the wicked spirit would provide Jesus with all the pleasures the world had to offer. What did all three temptations have in common? Don’t be led by God, do it your way, how you see fit. Independence from God is union with Satan and making its ways yours.

Do you remember when Peter, the great disciple tried to talk Jesus out of following the plan of the Father to save the world? While walking together along a dusty dirt road to some villages around Caesarea Philippi, Jesus explained to His followers that the Father had a plan for Him that perhaps they weren’t expecting. **He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.** (Mark 8: 31 NIV) Peter the Disciple then pulled Jesus the Lord aside and confronted Him on His negativity. **"Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"** (Matthew 16: 22 NIV) It is such an absurd reaction from Peter. Not odd because God experiences it all the time. Finite creatures deciding God doesn’t know what He is doing. It was absurd. How did Peter ever think He knew more than Jesus about the will of God, understood better how things should be? Yet that was exactly the case. Jesus did not just give it a pass though. He confronted Peter immediately. **Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."** (Matthew 16: 23 NIV)

It is a fine line between this love for the world and love for God. No one I think sets out to just hate God although many do. What takes place as James points out is that love of the world generates hate for God. The subtlety of this is astounding. You choose to do this or that and it is not what Christ wants of you, you have fallen into hatred for God and aligned yourself with Satan. Just for trying to talk Jesus out of accepting the Father’s plan of salvation by dying on the Cross, Peter thrust himself in Satan’s camp. The future of the world for those who have put their hope in Jesus for salvation is perfection, joy and vibrant, exciting peace. For Satan it is hell and destruction. Choose wisely what you want your life to be.