



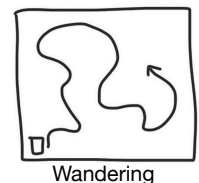
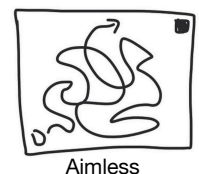
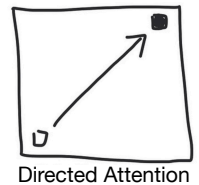
Staying Focused ~ Part 2: Dealing with Distractions

- WHAT IS A DISTRACTION?

- **Distractions**...for the sake of this study, distractions will refer to anything that keeps our attention and energy from what matters most, relationship with God the Father. To keep it simple, what really matters most is **living a life that is pleasing to God**.

- **Focus vs. Distraction**

- **Focus = Directed Attention**...You are focused on something, your focus is under your control. you are focused on the right thing, at the right time. If you're reading a magazine, you're paying attention to the words on the page, not thinking about something else, your attention is focused.
- **Distraction = Hijacked Attention**...You are focused on something, but you are not in control of your attention, and, you are probably focused on the wrong thing. For example, if you're driving, you take your eyes off the road because your phone tells you that someone's liked your last tweet.
- **Attention Overload = Aimless**...You are not focused, you are not in control of your attention and you are focused on the wrong thing, or nothing at all! Aimlessness is a product of cognitive overload, of having too many different things competing for your attention and weighing on your mind can cause you to lose focus.
- **Open Thought = Wandering**...You are not focused, not in control, but you are not supposed to be focused on something, so it's OK! Psychologically, there's a big difference between letting your mind drift while you're walking the dogs or lingering over a cup of coffee; having a long to-do list but not being able to focus on any specific thing because your brain refuses to focus; having a long to-do list but not doing any of it because something shiny is capturing your attention.



- **Monasticism:** Radical, 5th Century, Directed Attention

- In the Middle Ages, it was widely agreed that the most important thing to think about was **God**. Today, the thing we most have to focus attention on is usually **work**. They took very seriously the problem of getting people to

pay attention to what they considered the important things and eliminate the distractions in their lives. They also realized that **people might need to take some pretty drastic-looking steps to keep the mind in focus**. One of the key moves they made was the invention of the Monastery.

- **Medieval Christianity additionally developed rules about how to live in and use these buildings.** One of the earliest and most influential rule-setters was a Roman nobleman living at the end of the 5th century, by the name of **Benedict**. He founded a number of monasteries in Italy and he wrote an instruction manual for his followers, with a simple and emphatic title: *The Rule*.



Early anti-distraction guru, St. Benedict

- These gentle souls developed extensive rules concerning **eating** (modest meals twice a day), **silence** (talking only in designated places), **hair styles** (short hair), **clothing** (simple, functional), **schedules** (early to bed, early to rise), **sex** (no need), and **art** (to help get you in the mood for extended time with God).
- For contemporary Believers, one of the most embraced of the monastic brothers is **Brother Lawrence**, who served as a lay brother in a Carmelite monastery in the late 1600's. His collection of letters entitled, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, is very well know and well read. If you are truly interested in cultivating a deeper intimacy with God, this little book is an invaluable resource...
 - "He does not ask much of us, merely a thought of Him from time to time, a little act of adoration, sometimes to ask for His grace, sometimes to offer Him your sufferings, at other times to thank Him for the graces, past and present, He has bestowed on you, in the midst of your troubles to take solace in Him as often as you can. **Lift up your heart to Him during your meals and in company; the least little remembrance will always be the most pleasing to Him.** One need not cry out very loudly; He is nearer to us than we think." ~ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*
 - "One way to re-collect the mind easily in the time of prayer, and preserve it more in tranquility, is **not to let it wander too far** in other times: you should keep it strictly in the presence of God; and being accustomed to think of Him often, you will find it easy to keep your mind calm in the time of prayer, or at least to **recall it from its wanderings.**" ~ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*

- DISCERNING WHAT'S BEHIND A DISTRACTION

- **First, look at how distractions typically manifests themselves...**
 - **Fear, doubt and worry...** "So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today. (Matt 6:34 NLT-SE)
 - **Lack of discipline...** Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, **let us strip off every weight that slows us down**, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us **run with endurance the race** God has set before us. (Heb 12:1 NLT-SE)
 - **Unforgiveness...**⁶ "Why are you so **angry**?" the LORD asked Cain. "Why do you look so dejected? ⁷ You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! **Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you.** But you must subdue it and be its master." (Gen 4:6-7 NLT-SE)

- **Lust...**¹⁶ So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing **what your sinful nature craves**.
¹⁷ The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of **what the Spirit wants**. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. **These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.** (Gal 5:16–17 NLT-SE)
- **Temptation...**The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. **When you are tempted**, he will show you a way out so that you can endure. (1 Cor 10:13 NLT-SE)
- **Pride...**³⁸ As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹ Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught. ⁴⁰ But **Martha was distracted** by the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, **"Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work?"** Tell her to come and help me." ⁴¹ But the Lord said to her, "My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! ⁴² There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38–42 NLT-SE)
- **Now, ask yourself where all this distractive "fruit" might find its source? Basically, it's either our flesh rising up or the Enemy's strategy playing with our souls!**
 - ¹³ Therefore, **put on** every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. ¹⁴ **Stand** your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. ¹⁵ For shoes, **put on** the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. ¹⁶ In addition to all of these, **hold up** the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. ¹⁷ **Put on** salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ **Pray** in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere. (Eph 6:13–18 NLT-SE)

- WHAT IF THE "DISTRACTION" COMES FROM GOD

- When God interrupts our **plans**...When we want something so badly that we refuse to listen to *any* voice that threatens us getting what we want. We think, "This can't possible be the Holy Spirit. After all, Jesus wants me to be happy, right?" As a matter of fact...
- When God interrupts our **play**...When we think we deserve comfort, recreation, and "fun" and nothing is going to change my mind. "I had my time in the Word this morning. The rest of the day is mine!" Some of God's best "distractions" are clearly to alert us to his plan to love someone through our obedience.
- When God interrupts our **perceived potential**...When we think, "This can't be God! I'm not talented enough and don't have the time or money to obey this inner voice. It can't be God!" We don't believe God can fill in the gaps left in our ability, time or money. (2 Chr 20:15)
 - ¹⁰ How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me. ¹¹ Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. ¹² I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. ¹³ **For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.** (Phil 4:10–13 NLT-SE)

- ELIMINATING DEADLY DISTRACTIONS

- **Re-evaluate...**Don't be afraid to examine your own heart; what moves you, what motivates you, what drives you?
- **Re-pent...**Ready your heart for a change in direction, even being willing to move in the opposite direction if led by the Lord.
- **Re-focus...**Re-establish your goal. If the goal is that you want your life to be pleasing to the Lord, what can you dream, think and do that will move you that direction?
 - ⁵ It was by faith that Enoch was taken up to heaven without dying—"he disappeared, because God took him." For before he was taken up, **he was known as a person who pleased God.** ⁶ And **it is impossible to please God without faith.** Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him. (Heb 11:5–6 NLT-SE)
 - "Let us thus think often that **our only business in this life is to please GOD**, that perhaps all besides is but folly and vanity" ~ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*

- GROWING FROM DISTRACTION TO DEVOTION

- All it takes to turn a distraction into devotion is **obedience**. Obeying God in the midst of distractions is training us to be sensitive to the whispers of the Holy Spirit as He leads us through our daily lives.
 - ¹¹ Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; ¹² and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire **a still small voice.** (1 Kings 19:11–12 NKJV)
 - ²³ Jesus replied, "All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them...²⁶ But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will **teach you everything** and will **remind you of everything** I have told you. (John 14:23, 26 NLT-SE)
- Once you begin to establish a **"track record"** of obedience to the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit in your life, focus becomes a delight and encouragement. You find yourself consciously focusing on what's really important and not just following rules.
 - ¹⁹ Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? **You do not belong to yourself,** ²⁰ for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. (1 Cor 6:19–20 NLT-SE)