

Concentration: Staying Focused

By Bob Young

When I was a youth, one of my favorite TV game shows was “Concentration.” The game involved a grid of prizes one could win. A contestant turned over positions on the grid two at a time to reveal the prizes, and the goal was to remember the locations of certain shapes or dollar amounts to turn over a “matched set.” The game required grasping the larger context, developing a big picture view, analysis, memory, and taking multiple factors into account. In one sense, the game provides a metaphor for effectively doing “kingdom work” in this world. Concentration is simply another word for “focused attention.”

We are one month into the New Year. Many resolutions are history. Mission and ministry efforts around the world are in full swing for 2014. How can we experience God's best in 2014, making this the best year of our lives in the work of the Kingdom of God? This article suggests some things that we can still do during the rest of the year to improve our focus.

STAYING FOCUSED: TEN ESSENTIALS

Realize that the work is God's work. Because it is God's work, the first point of reference is to understand God's eternal plan for bringing the world under the Lordship of Jesus. While there may be various methods, the primary goal of the church is defined by God. Make certain your plan is biblical.

Keep the goal in mind. One of the great challenges of playing “Concentration” was the tendency of the players to have too many different prizes in mind. Generally, the most successful contestants focused on a limited number of prizes. Likewise, we must ask ourselves, what is our purpose? Keeping the purpose in focus is the work of the leaders. The task of casting the vision and keeping the focus on the goal is the work of leaders. It is the responsibility of the leader to make certain that the entire church remembers that the principal purpose of the church is to seek and save the lost.

Avoid distractions. You will face many distractions. You will be tempted to follow a myriad of good ideas and new techniques. You will be tempted to do a lot of things that will have little to do with the long-term goal of bringing the multitudes to Jesus. You will be tempted to scatter your energy on many immediate, temporal needs rather than concentrating on eternity.

Analyze the context. Some things work well in one context but not in another. Success in kingdom work requires working within the contextual set of factors. A friend of mine is doing a very effective work in a rural region of Latin America, but he frankly told me, “This will not work in an urban setting.” Know where you are in order to understand what to do to expand the borders of the kingdom in your locale.

Redouble your concentration. Concentration is hard work; it is continuous. Concentration by definition means not letting up, maintaining focus. Improving our focus in 2014 will require

that we give constant attention to the question, “What is God’s eternal purpose for the church?”

Recognize the value of the focused effort. We are called to convert the world, but we will convert the world one person at a time. The early church focused on the individual. Jesus did his initial work with 12 special followers. Jesus chose the small group environment to make disciples who would make disciples. When Jesus sent his followers out on an early mission, he sent them into homes where they could develop personal relationships. The early church followed Christ’s strategy and changed the world through ministry house to house. Paul taught from house to house. The early church met in small groups.

Understand that people can only do a few things well. If you want people to be involved in seeking and saving the lost, you cannot expect them to support and be involved in a wide variety of other church activities. People only have a certain amount of time. It takes time to make personal contacts with neighbors and prospects, to prepare one’s heart and mind to share the gospel, to attend evangelism classes, and to do the other related things necessary. To excel in the "one thing," people need to focus. If the work of the local church is loaded with a variety of ministries and programs and every member is expected to participate in every one of them, the members will be scattered and will not be able to concentrate on doing the “one thing” well.

Learn to say no. Multiplied well-intentioned programs cross the desk of the average local minister. Are the programs bad? No, many of them have been successful in other ministry contexts. Many times the problem is that they are not the right program for the local ministry context. Effective ministry is a matter of choosing the focus that is consistent with God’s purpose and the ministry context.

Learn to delegate. This is a difficult thing for many church leaders. Some do not know how to delegate, others do not want to delegate. There is power and prestige in being the main person to whom all others come. Some ministers and church leaders expect to know about and even be a part of every contact, and participate in every counseling appointment and Bible study. Such an approach disempowers the members. Delegation frees up the leader to focus on the real priority. Failure to delegate discourages the members and soon the minister or church leaders are expected to do all of the work. Effective delegation involves delegating responsibility. Too many leaders call it delegation when they are doing nothing more than giving a person a job or task to be done.

Equip the members. This is one goal of church leaders (Ephesians 4:11-13). The church does the work of the church. The members are to be involved in ministry. The leader does not have to do everything. The leader makes certain all are receiving proper care and encouragement.

How well did you stay focused on God’s eternal purpose in 2013? What do you plan to do in order to focus on God’s eternal purpose in 2014?