

Living Your Focus Word

A Tool For Christ-Like Character Formation

NAME _____

**FATHER, THE FOCUS WORD ON WHICH I SENSE
YOU WANT ME TO CONCENTRATE THIS YEAR IS**

(Work through pages 1-14 before filling in)



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www.FocusedLiving.com

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God is always pleased when his people put themselves in a position to grow! This tool was designed for just that purpose. As you work your way through this Focus Word process, remember that it's not about 'getting through' this book. It's about being more like Jesus and growing more in your love with Jesus. Although this study could be completed in a few months, our strong encouragement is to let things simmer over the good part of a year.

Because we are a men's ministry, we have composed this with men as our primary audience. However, the principles of choosing, studying, and applying a Focus Word are certainly transferable to an audience of women. Our hope is that this tool will be used by individuals, discipleship pairings and small groups to add focus and depth to their spiritual walk. Enjoy the journey!

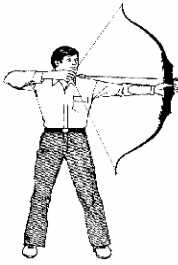
We dedicate this booklet to our beautiful brides, Janet and Katherine. Thanks for your continual prayers that we would become so **FOCUSED** on Jesus that we are **LIVING** like Jesus with both passion and purpose.

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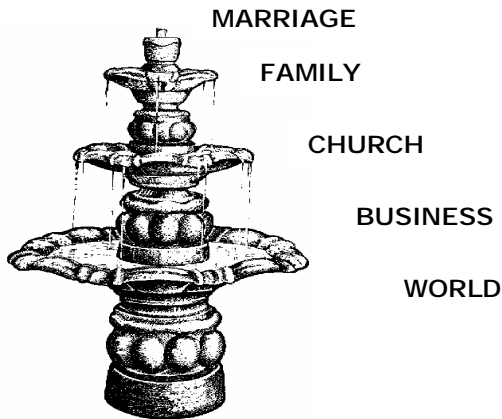
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The Vision

A man was walking along one day when he noticed a farmer randomly shooting arrows into the side of his barn. A few minutes later the farmer climbed up a ladder leaning against the barn and started to paint targets with each arrow in the center of the bulls eye. When he was finished, the farmer came down the ladder and announced to the bystander with a wide grin, "The townsfolk will sure be impressed!"



The Lord has called us to hit worthy targets! Instead of shooting aimlessly at worthless targets He wants His men to become more like Christ rather than impressing the townsfolk. It is His deep desire to grow an army of men who will walk so closely with Christ that His character will overflow into every relationship, circumstance, decision and opportunity in life.



Our Father God longs to...

OVER RULE us with His glorious majesty and

OVERWHELM us with His lavish love so that our lives will

OVERFLOW with His grace in order that we may victoriously

OVERCOME our culture, temptations and trials.

In his book, Power Through Prayer, E.M. Bound underscores this point in saying that, "*Men are God's method. The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men.*"

So how do we become 'better men?' One character quality at a time! Often our spiritual growth process seems complicated and overwhelming. We are not sure where to start. We do not understand

the steps needed. We mistakenly think it is all up to us. One way to make the spiritual maturing process less overwhelming is to allow the Lord to narrow your focus to a single area of your life which you sense He wants to build (mature) or rebuild (restore).

Even the Apostle Paul found it necessary to narrow his focus in order to grow more in Christ. In Philippians 3:13-14 he admits, *“I do not regard myself having laid hold of it yet; but **ONE THING** I do, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus!”* And that one goal was tapping into the power of the resurrected Christ. You see, Paul came to realize that the very same power that raised Jesus from the dead was available to Him through the Holy Spirit. And he wanted it!

Revelation 2:4 records Jesus commending the Ephesian church for their deeds, perseverance and theology. But then He challenges them on a single important area that they had greatly neglected. They had lost their first love for God and it desperately needed to be restored.

In fact, this is why Focused Living Ministries exists. We are committed to helping men become so **FOCUSED** on Christ that they begin **LIVING** out the priorities of Christ.

What would happen if you invested a whole year praying for, studying about, and living out a single character quality taught by Christ to His disciples? What if you made a central part of your life plan the choosing of one Focus Word each year for the rest of your life? Can you imagine what kind of a man, husband, father, leader, and businessman you would become as this single focus permeated every area of your life? Think ten years out. How would 10 Christ-like character qualities applied to every area of life radically change you? Think of the eternal impact it would make in your family and church family!

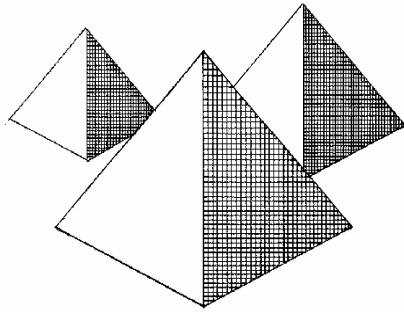
By focusing on a single character quality, discipline or Biblical role for the year, God will drive it deeply into your soul and lifestyle yielding a concentrated spiritual growth. Of course, the real focus is always on Jesus Christ. The one word focus simply positions you for intense growth and life transformation.

How would focusing on a single Christ-like character quality help you mature spiritually this year?

The Pyramid Principle

Now you may be asking, "That's going to be a lot of work! Is it worth the effort?" Well, think for a minute about the importance of a solid foundation. There is good reason why the pyramid is the only geometric shape that cannot be pushed around or pushed over. It's because of its massive base. It seems that many of God's men are getting shoved around and pushed over in almost every area of life. Why? Because our base is too small.

Think about it. In every other area of life a big base is essential for maximum performance. Physically, the marathon runner knows he must build a base of 50 miles a week in private before he can run 26 miles in public. The weight lifter knows that he must privately lift 1000s of pounds before he can lift his personal best



of 500 pounds in public. Relationally, every husband knows that the bigger his base of sacrificial love for his wife, the more likely the marriage will stand tall in the face of life's circumstances, pressures, and demands that press against it. Businessmen know that the greater their financial base the higher will be their summit of return. Educationally, the broader your base of learning, the more likely you will be at the top of your chosen field. Politically, the broader your base of support, the greater your chance of being elected.

The same is true spiritually. The bigger your spiritual base, the greater opportunity you have of reaching the top, the full potential of the man God has called you to be. The question is, "**How big is your base?**"

Because many of us have neglected the basic spiritual disciplines of scripture reading, prayer, verse memory and truth application some will liken choosing a Focus Word to carrying a 70 pound sack of cement. It's heavy, awkward, and dirty. But consider this: 70 pounds of cement properly set will support 70,000 pounds of weight for about 700 years. A little hard work of mixing God's Word into your life now will produce a foundation that will, for generations to come, support the weight of the various demands on your life and that of your family. Is it worth the work of getting dirty building a strong foundation? You bet it is.

Jesus taught His disciples the pyramid principle. He showed them how to build their lives on the solid foundational rock of obedience to God's Word. Listen to Jesus' words recorded in Luke's gospel.

*“Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? Everyone who comes to Me, and hears My words, and acts upon them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man **building a house**, who **dug deep and laid a foundation upon the rock**; and when a flood rose, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been **well built**. But the one who has heard, and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house upon the ground **without any foundation**; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great.” (Luke 6:46-49)*



Paul, too, was big on building big bases! He taught those he had led to Christ, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been **firmly rooted** and now being **built up** in Him and **established** in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.” (Colossians 2:6-7)

He understood that solid based men would lead their families, grow the church, and impact their culture by advancing God’s Kingdom. That is why he was constantly building folks upon the greatest foundation ever, Jesus Christ Himself.

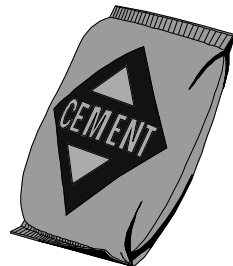
*“According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise **master builder I laid a foundation**, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a **foundation** other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the **foundation** with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.” (1 Corinthians 3:10-15)*

Now here is the single most important question you must ask and answer correctly if you are to mature in Christ. **WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT RESPONSIBILITY OF AN APPLE TREE?** (Hear the music theme from Jeopardy playing in the background as you jot your answer below **J**).

The correct Biblical answer: the primary responsibility of an apple tree is to **'KEEP ITS ROOTS IN THE GROUND!'** The fruits always follow the roots! In other words, choosing a Focus Word is a good way to help you grow your roots deep into Christ so that the fruit of a godly character will result in every season of your life. By the way, if you answered 'to produce apples' then we suggest you go back and review the principle of the pyramid.

Lately, would you say that you have been building more on solid rock or shifting sand? Why?

Before you get started, write out a prayer of commitment asking the Lord to guide you to the Focus Word which will help you to build a solid base and yield Christ-like fruit.



Choosing A Focus Word

We trust that you see the benefit of having a single focus for a season. Now the question is, What Focus Word should you choose? The first step in choosing a Focus Word is to prayerfully assess where you are spiritually so that you can determine where the Lord most wants you to grow. All through the process of creating the universe the Lord Himself evaluated and He invites you to do the same. (“*It is good!*” Genesis 1:10, 12,18, 21, 25, 31, 2:18).

So step back and take an honest assessment of your life. Do a quick spiritual inventory. Where are you doing well spiritually? What has satan stolen from the shelves of your life? Perhaps the following prayer will help you hear more clearly what the Lord has to say about the various areas of your life.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.” (Psalm 139:23-24)

Now that your heart is soft before the Lord, honestly reflect on your life by considering the following questions for **each** applicable area below. By each category, we’ve included some words / phrases that may stimulate your thoughts.

1. What is my strength in this area?
2. What is my weakness? Where do I most need to mature here?
3. How would my wife/kids/friends say that I need to grow here?
4. Have I been convicted to grow here in the past but have never really followed through?

Spiritually (love Jesus more now than 3 months ago, heart, obedience, listening, in tune, passionate, lost first love, distant, seeking, focused)

Basic Spiritual Disciplines (hunger for God, personal devotions, Word, prayer, verse memory, fasting, sporadic, consistent, truth applied)

Basic Spiritual Character Qualities (Fruit of Spirit: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*)

Emotionally/Attitude (content, joyful, anxious, responsive, reactive, high, low, self-centered, other oriented, positive, negative, distant)

Mentally (renewing, focused, reading, learning, growing, new insights, applying, wisdom, decisions, time management)

Physically (disciplined, exercise, sleep, eating, weight)

Socially (friendships, relationships, temptations, forgiveness, grace)

Financially (saving, tithing, giving, debt, investing, future, spending)

Marriage (relationship, communication, intimacy, physical, spiritual, leading, serving, fun, romance, focused attention)

Parenting (focused attention, teachable moments, time with each child, family devotions, discipline, prayer with and for, future, legacy)

Occupation/employment (relationships, satisfaction, work ethic, growing, skills, enjoyment, submission, temptations, focus)

Small group (fellowship, accountability, involvement, leading, caring)

Leadership (growing, shepherding, problem solving, opportunities, skills, future, style, goals, objectives)

Church member (worship, attitude, involvement, giving, spiritual gifts, service, available)

Evangelism (friendships, testimony, Gospel presentation, fear, strategy, neighbors, clients, intentional, bold, compassionate)

Discipleship (of children, vision for one man a year for life, investing, imparting basics, caring for)

Other

Now, prayerfully review. What does the Lord seem to be most impressing upon your heart? Is there a common theme or pattern? Is there an area in which you are particularly weak?

From your perspective, list a few areas which the Lord needs to restore, reclaim or rebuild most in your life this year?

Christ understood that becoming a *disciple* was far more important than merely making a *decision* to become a follower. Christ did not say, “Go into all the world and get men to make *decisions* about Me.” He commanded, “go into all the world and make *disciples* who will follow Me!” Jesus has called you to be His disciple. **What does a disciplined person look like?** Many have found the following acrostic for the word **D-I-S-C-I-P-L-E** a helpful way to picture a disciple.

Dominated by God’s grace in Christ.

Inspired daily by God’s Word

Surrendered to the Holy Spirit

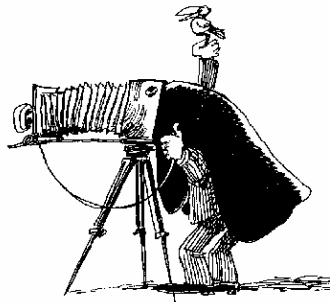
Committed to the work of prayer

Involvement in church’s work & worship

Pursues the lost with passion

Loves others as a servant

Exemplifies faith at home



Based on this DISCIPLE acrostic, which of the eight characteristics do you think the Holy Spirit might be asking the Father to build into you this coming year? Why?

Next, thoughtfully reflect on the following list of possible Focus Words. These are actual Focus Words which other men have chosen and pursued for a year. Each of these words / phrases can be traced to a trait that Jesus longs to see in the lives of His men. **As you review them, circle the ones that grab your attention.**

Abiding	Forgiving/Reconciling
Acceptance	Freedom
Accountable	Fruit of the Spirit
Acts of compassion/kindness	Generous/Giving
Administration	Gentle/Meek
Adopted son mind set	Good steward of time/talents/\$
Adoration/praise	Goodness/godliness
Alertness/sensitivity	Gracious/Merciful
Amaze	Healthy self-image
Applies truth to daily life	Kind
Authentic friendship	Kingdom building
Availability	Knows what to believe
Aware of satan's lies	Leadership skills
Balanced priorities	Leaves a legacy
Bold	Listen
Breaks evil strongholds	Loving
Brings Gospel to others	Love
Builds self-esteem	Loyalty
Celebrate	Maturity
Communicates/Teach Truth	Mentoring
Confession	Missions minded
Contentment	Nurturing father/grandfather
Courageous/Risking	Obedience
Creativity	Other-oriented
Daily Bible reading/study	Overflow
Deep communion	Passionate
Dependability	Patience
Dependent on God	Peace
Diligence	Peacemaker
Discerns God's call	Prayer
Discipline/self-control	Praising
Edifies others	Preaching
Endurance	Prepared
Evangelism/heart for lost	Purity
Faithful	Purposed/focused
Family mission/goals	Reflective
Family prayer	Reliance on God for all
Fasting	Reverent
Flexible	Rightly motivated

Sacrificial husband	Thankful
Secure in Christ	Thinks strategically
Security	Time management
Selfless	Transformed
Serving	Truth applied to culture
Sincerity	Understanding
Single-minded/Focused	Unity/teamwork
Sonship	Verse memory
Spiritual gifts	Vulnerable
Spiritual warfare	Willing
Surrendered	Wisdom
Teachable	Worshiping
Tender Heart	Zealous/ambitious for God

Like pruning, it is vital for you to eliminate in order to concentrate on just one aspect during this season of life. Of course, choosing one word for the year does not limit God's work to only that area. You will be surprised at the many ways the Lord transforms as you focus on a single area. So, **which 2-3 words gripped your heart?**

Discuss your findings/insights with your wife or with a friend if you are unmarried. On what Focus Word do they think you need to focus? Why?

What quality would your children like to see Christ build into your life this coming year? If they are 12 or older, sit down and have a conversation with them about this.

**FATHER, THE FOCUS WORD ON WHICH I SENSE
YOU WANT ME TO CONCENTRATE THIS YEAR IS**

(Record this Focus Word also in the box on page 1)

CEMENTING YOUR FOCUS WORD

The important step of choosing your Focus Word is done. Now it is time to discover what God has to say about it. The following principles/suggestions will help you process God's truth from your **HEAD** to your **HEART** to your **HANDS** until it forms a **HABIT!** To build a strong structural foundation, God's truth must be processed. There is no real spiritual *progress* without spiritual *process!*



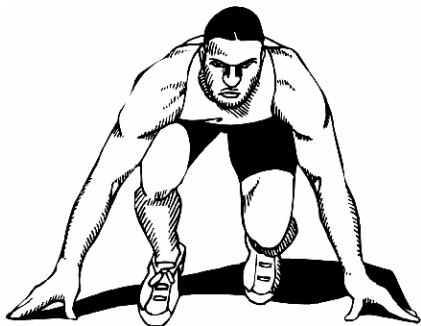
START WITH PRAYER to make sure that your heart is open to all that the Lord wants to teach you. Remember that the Bible is the Father's love letter to you! Luke 5:16 says that "*Jesus would often slip into the wilderness to pray.*" He demonstrated a constant submission to the Father. As you approach the Word in each step, pray that you would be like Ezra who "*set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel?*" (Ezra 7:10)



BE DILIGENT TO WRITE DOWN WHAT YOU DISCOVER. "*The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying....Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book.*" (Jeremiah 30:1-2) "*The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face just as a man speaks with a friend...The Lord said to Moses, 'Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.'* So he was there with the Lord forty days; he did not eat bread or drink water. **And he wrote** on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments." (Exodus 33:11, 34:27-29) Keep in mind that the Lord will be asking you to pass on to your family and church family the things you glean each day. "**This will be written** for the generation to come; that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord." (Psalm 102:18)



DON'T GIVE UP OVER A LITTLE HARD WORK. Remember the cement. The hard work will be worth the effort. Paul challenged Timothy to "*be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.*" (2 Timothy 2:15) He also exhorted him to "take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all." (1 Timothy 4:15)



Step 1

Getting Started

Date _____

We realize that you may be new in your relationship with the Lord and might not be very familiar with Scripture. Not to worry. We encourage you to ask the help of a more mature follower of Christ who will gladly help you walk you through this cementing process.

Explain in detail why you sense God led you to choose this particular Focus Word for the year?

Describe what life changes you hope to see by the end of the year after intentionally opening yourself up for growth in this area.

BRAINSTORM RELATED WORDS & CONCEPTS

Whatever Focus Word you have chosen, undoubtedly there are a variety of words in Scripture that touch on the same concept. For example, if your Focus Word is '*surrender*' related words might include *yield, obey, submit, serve, and lordship*. This range of meaning is significant for you to know when you start to do your concordance work. Your actual Focus Word may not be mentioned very often in Scripture, but the core concept of your word may appear frequently. So

don't become discouraged if you have chosen the Focus Word '*commitment*' and discover that the actual word doesn't even appear in Scripture. The core concept of the word '*commitment*' is found on almost every page of the Bible through such words/phrases as '*follow Me*', '*die to self*', '*in Christ*', '*pressing forward*', '*lovingkindness*', '*trust*' or any command which assumes commitment to obey it.

Make a list of synonyms or concepts which are related to your Focus Word. Realize that you will be adding to these as you dig deeper and discover more about the limitless depth of the Scriptures concerning your Focus Word. Your thoughtful reflection on this step will make your concordance work over the next few steps flow much more smoothly **J**.

Sometimes people are mentioned in Scripture who clearly demonstrate your Focus Word. For example, Esther was an outstanding example of a woman who trusted the Lord completely yet the word 'trust' or even 'God' is never mentioned in the book of Esther. **Can you think of any biblical characters who either positively or negatively portray your Focus Word.**

Lord, I want to be more like Christ. Hear now my prayer of commitment and surrender so that in the power of the Holy Spirit my Focus Word might become a reality in my life.



Step 2

Concordance Work in Old Testament

Date _____

Using a concordance, topical Bible, or a computer search tool like www.blueletterbible.com or www.crosswalk.com look up your Focus Word. In addition, you may want to look up several of the synonyms you wrote down in Step 1 (p 17). Most likely, you will have a list of Scriptures as a result of this search. Scan the list. Sometimes you can immediately rule out verses based on the little bit of context you can see. For the remaining verses, look each of them up in your own Bible, reading the paragraphs on either side of your verse in order to gain a context. If the passage seems like one that will shed insight on your Focus Word, then record the Scripture address below along with a brief summary so you'll remember what the passage is about. Identify at least six passages in this way.

For example, let's say your Focus Word is **'obey'** or **'obedience'**. In your concordance you will find approximately 100 Old Testament references in which this word is used. Peruse the list and choose a few which seem to use the word 'obey' in the same sense that you want to emphasize. If you found Exodus 19:5, you might jot down:

Ex 19:5 "If you obey my voice, you will be my own possession" (God talking to Israel at Sinai)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

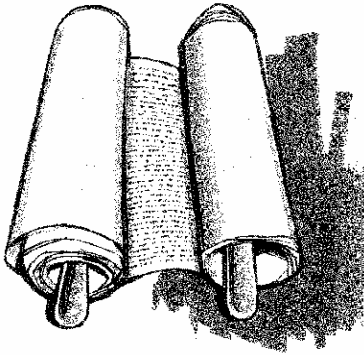
6.

7. What Old Testament character (individual or group) positively models your Focus Word? (Need help? Use the fine resources of your wife, pastor, elder, deacon, mentor or an author who has written on your subject.)

8. What Old Testament character is a negative example of your Focus Word?

NOTE: There is more space on pages 24-27 to list additional passages and notes.

Now that you have identified 8 Old Testament verses/passages regarding your Focus Word step back from your preliminary work for a moment. **Write out a prayer that reflects your heart impressions thus far.** *Lord, as I read these great verses of Scripture I...*



Step 3

Studying Old Testament Passages (Part 1)

Date _____

CEMENT AND APPLY SO YOU WON'T DIE!

Remember, the reason we study the Scripture in depth is to build a solid foundation on which Christ can build His character qualities in our life. Study the first three passages you wrote down in **Step 2** (p 18). Use the following pattern for each passage.

- √ Study the verse in its context by reading slowly through the paragraph before and after, if not the whole chapter. Read the passage at least twice.
- √ What is the main principle/insight that the Lord seems to be screaming out concerning your Focus Word.
- √ Write a short, meaningful prayer to the Lord talking over with Him how you plan to live out the principle you discovered.

PASSAGE 1 _____

PASSAGE 2 _____

PASSAGE 3 _____