

Keep Your Eye On The Ball

Mr. Bischoff was one of my teachers in 7th and 8th grade. We thought he was pretty cool, since he had played professional baseball in the Los Angeles Dodgers' minor league organization before becoming a school teacher. Being an athlete, Mr. Bischoff knew well the importance of keeping your eye on the ball. Take your eye off it as a batter, and you strike out; take your eye off it as an outfielder, and you commit a lot of errors. There is no room for distraction on the ball field.

Mr. Bischoff also knew well how distracted his students could become. So he posted signs high up on the walls, close to the ceiling. A typical one would say something like, "What are you looking up here for? The assignment is on your desk." Another, near the clock, said, "Time will pass, but will you?" Mr. Bischoff had found an effective way to keep us focused on our work.

In this week's passage, the apostles receive an assignment from Jesus before his return to heaven. They immediately get distracted and must be reminded to stay focused. But then they get down to work, keeping their eye on the ball.

Monday – Saying and Doing

1. Please read Acts 1:1-5. The "former book" mentioned is the Gospel of Luke, located just two books earlier in your Bible. What does Luke say he wrote about in his earlier book?
2. Looking at verse 2, what does Jesus pass on to the apostles? How do you think they were supposed to carry out these instructions without Jesus right there with them? Look to verse 4 for the answer. What is the promise there?
3. Now turn to John 16, verses 7, 13 and 14. What does Jesus say must happen before the Holy Spirit can come to his followers? What will the Spirit do for them? What will the Spirit bring to Jesus?

Making it Personal: Are you following the Holy Spirit's lead in your life? A good test is to see whether you live for yourself, or to bring glory to God.

Tuesday – Priorities

1. In Acts 1:6-11, we see competing priorities. According to verse 6, what is at the top of the apostles' agenda? Why do you think they felt that way? In verse 8, Jesus gives them a new priority. What is it? How do you think the apostles felt then?
2. In verses 9-11, we see the last recorded instance of Jesus' physical life on earth. But is it the last time anyone will ever see Jesus again in the flesh? (Look closely at verse 11.)
3. If you were there with the apostles and you just saw Jesus ascend, how would you take the question posed by the angels in verse 11?

Wednesday – Prayer: The First Order of Business

1. Please read Acts 1:12-14. What did the apostles do as soon as they returned to Jerusalem? How often did they do it?
2. Who joined the prayer sessions with the apostles? See Luke 24:1-10 for more information on the women involved in these prayer times.
3. See John 7:1-5 for an early view of Jesus by his brothers. How is their participation in prayer with the apostles a change from their earlier treatment of him?

Thursday – Getting ahead of themselves

1. What are the apostles doing in Acts 1:15-26? Why do you think they relied on casting lots (something like tossing dice)? If they had received the promised Holy Spirit would they have chosen to cast lots?

Text Insight: Exodus 29:29-30 tells us that the Urim and Thummim were decision making tools. They were used as a way to cast lots. According to Ezra 2:63 and Nehemiah 7:65, only priests were capable of using these tools. The scene in Acts 1:26, shortly before the arrival of the Holy Spirit, is the last instance of such decision making in the Bible. After this, believers relied upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit in tandem with God's Word.

2. Read Acts 1:16. What was Peter's view of Scripture. Why did Peter find it so reliable? See 1 Timothy 3:16-17 for a broader statement of the nature of Scripture. What can Scripture bring us, according to Paul (2 Tim. 3:16-17)?
3. Both Paul (in 1 Timothy) and Peter (in Acts 1) agree as to the origin of Scripture. From where did it originate?

Putting it into Practice – If the Apostles found the Scriptures reliable, so should we. In what ways are you demonstrating your reliance on God's Word in your life right now? How will you rely upon it today?

Friday – Ready for Anything

1. Isaiah 6:1-8 and Jeremiah 1:4-8 are two examples of people getting instructions from God and then acting on them. What similarities do you see between Isaiah, Jeremiah and the apostles?
2. In Acts 1:8, Jesus tells his friends that they will receive power from the Holy Spirit, and then be Jesus' witnesses. How does this compare with Jeremiah 1:8 and Isaiah 6:6-7? Who makes it possible for us to do anything for God?

For the Weekend: Re-read the passages in Acts 1, Isaiah 6 and Jeremiah 1. Spend time considering how you can stay focused on God's plans for you; ask him to make it possible for you to keep your eye on the ball.