



**Teen Life
ministries**

**Staying F.o.c.u.s.e.d.
and on F.i.r.e.**

From <http://TeenLifeMinistries.com>



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Pastor. Shepherd. Minister. Leader. Planner. Counselor. Friend. Teacher.
Preacher. Communicator. Director. Equipper. Mentor. Discipler. Evangelist.

Those are just a FEW of the responsibilities and expectations of a pastor. The calling is a high honor and carries a lot of weight.

Yet, we are no different than the ones we serve. We struggle with sin, have the same need for Christ, and wrestle with ways to stay focused and on fire. We can find ourselves on the pinnacle or in the pit within the same 24 hours.

Hopefully, this short report will encourage you. It's designed to help you assess and have a short checklist of ways to keep your heart on the prize, while your hands serve God's people.

The Big Ds

Before getting to staying focused and on fire, let's look at a couple of things that derail our ministries...

Desires

¹⁴but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. James 1

Satan doesn't give up. We have to stay on guard if we are going to stay focused and on fire!

What desires derail you? Everyone has a different list particular to them, what's yours?

The key is being aware of your particular weaknesses and then being on guard. Too often in ministry we are too busy to take the time to reflect and come to grips with what tempts us. We believe that ignoring our desires will protect us.

The opposite is true. When we lower our watch, the enemy sneaks in without being seen until it's too late.

The formula for sin is predictable...

1. Evil Desire
2. Dragged away
3. Enticed
4. Action
5. Sin
6. Death

It's not that we don't know the pattern of sin, it's that we fail to see what step we are in.

Pray for awareness. Pray like David and ask God to find if there is "any offensive way in me."

Discouragement/Depression/Disillusionment

⁹ There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁰ He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." 1 Kings 19

Isn't it amazing how victory can lead to defeat?

That's what Elijah experienced. Everyone in ministry has experienced the same.

The Triple D Threat of *discouragement, depression, and disillusionment* create...

1. Burnout
2. Anger
3. Bitterness
4. Frustration
5. Overwhelm
6. Give up
7. Give in
8. Give out

And those are just the things off the top of my head. There are more. A lot more.

The triple Ds lead to another D: **Danger**.

We're in danger of leaving or losing the calling. In danger of hurting those we love. In danger of failing to take care of the church. In danger of spending time in a secret sin.

Are you experiencing any of these right now? Is your life or ministry in distress?

The rest of this report deals with battling and conquering these areas by remaining focused and on fire. It also will help us maximize the impact and influence of our ministries. It will give us a framework for goals, direction, and vision.

But it will require some soul searching. Be honest with yourself as we go through these elements.

How to Stay F.O.C.U.S.E.D

A pastor friend asked me on the way to Atlanta to see a Thrashers hockey game, "What do you think about ADD? So many people seem to have an inability to stay on track for very long?"

We talked about the fast pace of society. The shorting of attention spans. The social training of impulse and immediacy. But the bottom line was that most, including ourselves, possess a lack of focus. We're lazy. Not in work ethic as much as in thought. Most people just enter the jet stream of life and hit cruise. Taking the turbulence when it comes as just part of life without making any major corrections.

The average life has no focus. Not laser beam of purpose. And although what follows is not a complete answer, it is a good starting place for us as ministry leaders to make sure we are on track...

Foundation

¹¹For no one can lay any **foundation** other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. I Corinthians 3

Jesus is the foundation and anchor. The filter through which we determine what to preach or participate in.

We KNOW this, but do we LIVE it?

Information and knowledge is plentiful, it's making the turn to application where many get hung up.

Focus begins with the foundation.

A few years ago WWJD reigned on the wrists of believers around the globe. But did it reign in the heart? Anyone can ask a question, but living the answer – well, that's the true test.

Look at this foundation from the life of Ezra...

¹⁰For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.
Ezra 7

Ezra...

1. Learned - study
2. Lived - observed
3. Lead - taught

That's a focused foundation. That focus leads to restoration in Chapters 9-10 of Ezra. If he had not been devoted to those three areas then sin would NOT have bothered him, and the temple would not have been a priority.

Our focus begins and ends with Christ. Our planning, preaching, visioning – everything – must pass through him.

How do you rate on Jesus as your foundation?

(1=poor 10=nothing goes in or out of my life without going through him)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Optimism

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Philippians 4.

Optimism gets a bad rap. It's been dissolved to a Pollyanna, pie in the sky sort of thinking. If it's based in nothing more than a silver lining when the sky is falling I guess it should get a beating.

But I think about optimism this way...

Optimism: looking at the past, present, and future with hope and expectation based on God's promises.

Optimism produces a positive vision for ourselves and others.

It allows us to see...

1. The good in bad circumstances.
2. The possibility of a changed life.
3. God's hand and influence.
4. The final victory and use it for present motivation.

Do you consider yourself optimistic? More importantly, would others describe you that way?

Optimism creates focus through the positive energy that comes with it.

Pessimism, on the other hand, drains us. It de-motivates and makes us sluggish. It leaves us feeling empty and purposeless.

Have you noticed of optimism and focus walk together? Don't you seem to have unlimited concentration on something you are interested in? Haven't you noticed you don't need an alarm clock to get up when you're doing what you love? Being positive generates excitement and motivation.

How do you rate your optimism?

(1=I'm generally negative 10=I see the good in everything)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Clarity

¹²That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. ² Timothy 1

The Apostle Paul was clear. He uses words like "know, believe, convinced." He held certainty close to his heart and mind.

The reason for the failure rate of lives today is a lack of clarity. They do not know where they want to go or what they want become.

We must know with certainty the WHY behind what we are doing.

Each message should have a clear goal.

Each bite of food a purpose.

Each letter written...each gift given...each ministry started...each purchase...each goal...each task...each.....

Everything in life should be clear for us. We should be able to state with precision the reason we made certain choices.

This might seem extreme. Fanatical.

But the major reason for lack of accomplish is the lack of an obvious destination and a plan to get there.

If you were to leave your home today and drive to Sacramento, CA, you would budget, map, check the weather, pack, etc. ALL based on what would take to get there and what it would be like when you arrived.

As crazy as it may seem...

The average person on the planet puts more thought and planning into a travel destination than their lives.

What about you?

- Don't just plan the sermon series, shoot for an outcome.
- Don't just start ministry. Know its precise purpose.
- Don't just pump people up. Show them how to live it out.

When we are clear, specific, precise we will KNOW that what we are doing matters and makes a difference. It will make it much easier to stay on task and accomplish more, faster.

How do you rate your clarity?

(1=unclear 10=I know the exact purpose of each idea and activity)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Unity

¹² Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. Ecclesiastes 4

Uniting with two or three other pastors will create focus through accountability. Occasionally we will attend a conference and meet up with a few fellow workers, but we need more than that.

Do you have a group to plan and pray with? Do you get together at least once a month? Who are you banding with?

Accountability brings to mind confession of sin and regular checkups on particular struggles. It can/should include this aspect, but wait, there's more!

We should get together with others and say, "How's the series going?" "What are you studying?" "You mentioned beginning an exercise program how that working out?" "You mentioned needing to cut a ministry leader. Did you follow through?"

Unite with others and express your goals and dreams...

1. It forces specificity.
2. It calls for responsibility
3. It brings new ideas to mind
4. It helps realign focus and clarity.
5. It puts you on record.
6. It forms a brotherhood.

Soloism ranks supreme in our culture (America). Individualism appears strong, but it is actually a great weakness.

"two can defend themselves."

"A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

Trying to remain focused alone, it's not strength.

How do you rate with unity?

(1=pure soloist 10=I have a team I meet with regularly)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Serving

⁴⁵ “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10

Too often we make goals and resolutions for OUR benefit.

Instead, we will gain focus by making goals for OTHERS.

“I want to lose 20 pounds, so I will be healthier for my kids.”

“I want to become a better speaker, so more people will understand exactly how to live for Christ.”

Stay focused by seeing who you are serving.

Keep pictures of your family, team members, and church members close to you. When you begin to lose focus on a project look at a picture and remind yourself about WHO you are serving (God and his people).

It's not that we need to remain on job for the job's sake, but for the sake of the kingdom.

Your life provides value to the lives of others. Your study, example, conversations, effort and more ALL make a huge impact.

This small story makes the point...

A few years I took a hike with a member of my group. I didn't want to. My attitude stunk. But what could I do, no one else would go with him.

We did a five mile down and back trek through a rock littered mount. The guy wasn't in great shape. We stopped a lot. I asked myself why I agreed to take the hike - a lot. It was not one of those "get to know each other and have a breakthrough moment" type of times. But soon the hike was over and we joined the rest of the group.

I forgot all about the hike. Gladly.

Not long after that the guy moved away. He asked permission to thank the church and they let him. As he went to the podium with his 20 sheets of notebook

paper I knew we were in for it. Then I heard my name..."and I especially want to thank Paul for the hike."

Whoa. He didn't thank me for my cool talks or profound insight? Nope, a hike.

There's no need to worry about all the neat stuff you do, it will all be forgotten. It's those "insignificant" moments that count.

Serving is not always easy, and it's rarely glamorous, but WOW does it help realign focus!

How do you rate on serving with purpose?

(1=poor 10=I realize the valuable contribution of my actions)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Endurance

⁵But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. 2 Timothy 4

I'm writing this a few days before January 1. While I'm not in the worst shape of my life, I may be challenging it. But all that will change at the beginning of the new year! At this moment a few flights of stairs might do me in. My endurance is low. However, with the right diet and training and a 60 day commitment that will change.

It's no different spiritually, in ministry, or life in general. Our endurance, our length of focus, can be improved with training.

Look how Paul trained Timothy...

- 1. keep your head in all situations**
- 2. endure hardship**
- 3. do the work of an evangelist**
- 4. discharge all the duties of your ministry**

We can train ourselves to remain focused on the goal, whatever it may be...

1. Plan each day the night before.
2. Review the day before getting started on your work.
3. Review again before beginning the afternoon.
4. Use a checklist to monitor what you have accomplished.
5. Keep a list of core values with you and review at least once a week.

Likewise our endurance gets trained by...

1. The ability to handle distractions and interruptions.
2. Working through challenges and tough circumstances.
3. Pounding out the effort even when bored.

Being willing to work THROUGH a problem instead of giving up produces endurance and keeps us focused.

How do you rate on endurance?

(1=winded by the least distraction 10=able to keep pushing through the pain)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Discipline

²³Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. Colossians 3

A friend of mine defines discipline as “the ability to get yourself to take action regardless of your emotional state.”

It's compiled of...

1. Commitment.
2. Willpower.
3. Hard work.
4. Perseverance
5. Consistency.

Instead of deciding on discipline have you noticed how many people lock into excuses?

“I don't have time to study the Bible.”

“My kids are just wild I can’t do anything with them.”

“It’s just not fair. Nothing works out for me.”

“I’ve got a short attention span. You can’t expect me to stay focused long.”

Most, if not all, of these “problems” can be solved with discipline. Making a conscious determined decision to reach a particular goal or aim.

Discipline is any training intended to produce a specific character or pattern of behavior, especially training that produces moral, physical, or mental development in a particular direction.

What it means to us is that we are willing to make a commitment no matter what. We don’t make excuses or rationalizations. We accept responsibility for what we say we will do and expect negative consequences for failing to do so.

Think about the number of people who sign up for a ministry then fail to show up. They never apologize. They’re not concerned about it. Why? No disciplined commitment. They see their participation as optional.

Optional will NEVER produce peak performance.

How do you become more disciplined?

1. Decide.
2. Devote yourself.
3. Dedicate a plan.
4. Do the work.

How do you rate on discipline?

(1=give up at a moment’s notice 10=I don’t give up no matter what)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Well, focus is absolutely no fun if there is no FIRE. You can be focused and accomplish a lot, but unless there is positive energy behind the focus it feels like a drudgery.

So let’s get on...

F.I.R.E.

Do you remember those first days as a Christian? Do you remember the excitement? Hopefully, you STILL feel that. It's fire.

Ffaith

⁹When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." Luke 7

⁶And he was amazed at their lack of faith. Mark 6

Faith is the only thing that we know AMAZED Jesus. Whether it was weak or strong, he was amazed by it.

The faith of a grain of mustard seed can move mountains.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen.

Faith is what keeps us on fire.

In the spiritual faith is the belief and unwavering trust in God. It's believing in Christ and eternal life in Him.

In the physical faith is belief that future results will make a positive difference. Though it is a 2 way street...

²⁹Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith will it be done to you" Matthew 9

Jesus left the amount of healing up to the amount of faith. Isn't that same spiritual principle still at work in the physical? If you don't believe you will lose that ten pounds – you're right! If you do believe – you're right!

I asked my friend Kenneth one day, "If great faith moves mountains what will great doubt do?"

He relied, "I guess it will move the mountain on top of you."

Iinformation

⁵ let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance-
Proverbs 1

We must continue to grow to stay on fire. We need a constant stream of spiritual information pouring into our lives.

- 1) Read the bible daily.
- 2) Read Christian books.
- 3) Listen to tapes.
- 4) Attend seminars and events.
- 5) Meet with a study group.
- 6) Surround yourself with spiritual people.

The proverb says, “the wise listen”

We cannot expect to stay on fire if we do all the talking. We need to take the time for learning. Not just so we can teach but so WE can grow personally. Even if we never give another lesson, we need to seek information overload.

A fire goes out when it is not fed. The type of fuel determines the heat and height of the fire.

If we choose to allow ungodly media and recourses into our lives, then our fire will consist of the ungodly. If we feed our spirits with the six things (and more) mentioned above, then that’s the type of fire it will produce.

Retreat

³⁵Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Mark 1

This is one of my favorite passages. Jesus experienced a grueling day before this. Yet, the next morning he’s up early and seeking the Father.

Before going forward, Jesus went away.

What do you need to get away from? You need time to rejuvenate. We all do. And I’m not talking about vacation. We need to have a few minutes each morning just to retreat and refocus. A time to seek God.

Each month we need to take half a day to retreat. Read the word. Relax. Be lazy with God.

Yes, we already KNOW we should be doing that, but do you have the guts and discipline to carry it out. 95% us ministry types get on a retreat and start trying to be productive. We start planning the next great event. We don't want to waste time because we think it is a sin.

Terry Hershey defines Sabbath as "Wasting time with God."

A retreat is rest with a purpose. It's a time to clear our minds of the clutter that fills it most of the time. It allows us to get on track and be who he calls us to be.

Get your calendar out and mark your monthly retreat date for the next 12 months.

Encouragement

¹⁵After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak." Acts 13

Encouragement is a fire unto itself!

When we speak uplifting words, we are uplifted. Pointing out good news, accomplishments, successes, etc. not only builds the person they are about, they build us!

Let's build the fire by...

Encouraging Others:

1. Praise for a job well done.
2. When you hear something positive about someone, call and bless him/her.
3. When someone feels like giving up pull along side with some words to keep them going.

Encourage Yourself:

1. Pat yourself on the back for project completion or reaching a goal.
2. Accept compliments with grace.
3. Surround yourself with friends who honestly support.

This is our prayer for your fire...

¹⁵ brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. ¹⁶May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. 2 Thessalonians 2.

We hope the words of this report will strengthen your ministry and keep you focused and on fire!



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