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Heavenly Father, I pray that You would guide my words, guide my heart as I speak right now. I pray that everything I say that is from You would be from You, and that, God, anything I say that's not from You, that would just go over everyone's head, that would not pay attention to anything that is not Your truth for all of us here today. In Jesus' name, amen. So the theme of this year's summer camps, and also fall and winter camps, which of course I have been involved a lot with lately, is focus. Our theme is focus. And as I was practicing this, I had to practice that line several times because I kept saying the focus of this year's camp, and I realized that I can't say that the focus is focus. The theme of this year's camp is focus. And as I was coming up with ideas about what to say, I just decided, I realized that, oh, these things all kind of are about focusing on a different aspect of God, and so let's just go with focus. So I'll start off right with my final line of the sermon, which is this. In order to live out your Christian life correctly, you need to focus on God's truth, His kingdom, and His glory. To live out your Christian walk in victory and in power and in success, you need to make a conscious effort day by day to focus on what is God's truth, what is God's kingdom supposed to look like, and who is God, what is His glory, His beauty, focusing on these three things. So let's start by talking about truth, and I realized last time I was here, I had so many people compliment me on my multimedia extravaganza the last time, and this time I've been so busy that you get one slide. That's all you get this time, and I made it just before the sermon started so that you wouldn't just have a black screen. Yeah, sorry, kind of crazy right now. Focusing on God's truth, that's our first point. So over the weekend, I have been at a conference, and a lot of the pastors from Western yearly meeting have been there, and it was interesting. I got to hear a lot of different viewpoints on how other people walk out their Quaker faith and what their particular beliefs are. It made me realize that a lot of us have a swirling mass of thoughts and feelings and emotions and preconceptions inside of us, and a lot of times, some people, probably all of us, are unsure which ones of those feelings are the Holy Spirit leading us, and which one of those feelings is just feelings. Maybe that cheeseburger we had last night, which is actually paraphrasing a Christmas carol. Yeah, there's so much going on inside of our hearts and our minds, and these thoughts we have our feelings, even though they're genuinely our thoughts and our feelings, they do not necessarily tend towards the truth of God. In fact, the heart of man tends away from God. Even though it feels like it's coming from within us, and even though it feels like this must be the way things are, it's not necessarily the way things are. I remember a time when I was doing one of my schools with YWAM, and we were in... The school was in Hawaii, and we snuck off to... Well, yeah, we didn't sneak off. We legitimately got permission to leave, but then we snuck into the Hilton, because the Hilton in Hawaii has just got 10 swimming pools and water slides, and there's got a place you can swim with dolphins, and it was just crazy. So we were like, "Let's go there. That sounds like fun." And I remember that some of the girls were over in a hot tub, and me and my friend, we were out swimming, and we said, "Let's go hang out with them." We ran over to them, and we came in, and a couple of them just kind of looked at each other and smiled, and I misread that. I thought they were making fun of me, and we walked in on them talking about me behind my back, and I was so certain of it. And I was absolutely convinced I would have bet money that they had been talking about me behind my back, and it turns out later on, one of them proposed to the guy I was with, and I realized what they were actually talking about when I wasn't there. But I was so certain. My feelings... Like, if you had said, "Oh, was this discernment?" I would have said, "Yes, this was spiritual discernment." I knew exactly what they were thinking, and I was wrong. I was completely wrong. Our feelings are crazy, and you can't trust them. I once had a friend who was afraid of frogs, and we worked at Target together, and there was one time where a statue of a frog ended up right by the door to the break room. She would not go into the break room until one of us moved that frog. And it's like, "Frogs are slimy and kind of gross, but you don't have to be afraid of them. I mean, not like snakes." Snakes, that's legitimate. But frogs, it's like, "What?" And this is just kind of an example of the stuff that goes on inside us is... It's untrustworthy. It's chaotic. And it does not tend towards the truth of God. And so, as we're living our life, what we need to do is, as the Bible says, take every thought captive. And thought doesn't have to just be thoughts. It can be feelings and emotions and everything else that comes out of inside of us. You need to take it captive, and you need to hold it in the light of God's truth. When you... If you sin or you mess up and you think that God will never forgive this, He's rejected me, and you might feel absolutely worthless and terrible, you have to hold those feelings in the light of the Scripture that says, "I will never leave you or forsake you." Of the Scripture that says, not even a worthless little sparrow falls to the ground apart from God's will, and you are worth more than so many sparrows. So when our thoughts and our feelings, and they are legitimate thoughts and feelings, and they feel so real and so certain, but when they come up, we have to hold them in the light of God's truth and say, "Is this actually true? Is what I'm feeling true according to God?" When you feel the urge to speak with someone, to share God's truth, and you're like, "I'm going to flub over my words. I don't know what I'm going to say," you have to remind yourself that in those situations the Holy Spirit will give you the words to say and to not be afraid. So that's like the internal war against truth that you have to wage, but then also there is a war against the lies that come from inside you. There's also lies that come from outside you. And obviously, when you think about the lies that this world tells you, then there's obviously the big stuff, the stuff that you hear when people attack Christians politically and social-justicily and everything. Those things make the big headlines, but I encourage you to focus more on the little things. What does the world say about gossip? When those people start talking about someone behind that guy's back, what does God's truth say about gossip? Or when the world says, "Yeah, you can lie about the little stuff." What does God's truth say? Or pride, oh my goodness, pride. People who say, "I'm just going to do things my way and people have to just stop stepping on me and I'm just going to take what I deserve and I've given enough." What does the word say? Jesus says, "You give and you give and you give." There's never a point where you give enough as a Christian. And also, look at the things that the world values and lives for. The world says, "Give 10 percent. Give a little bit. Have your family and your close friends, but everyone else is kind of on their own. Save up enough money to have lots of fun." And God says that all of the stuff of this world that the people are living for, all of their wealth and their pleasures is going to be burned up eventually. And then all you'll be left with is the treasure that you sent to heaven through the giving in service. So question the lies that come from inside you, but also question the lies that the world sets up. It seems like kind of a rudimentary thing to talk about, but it's because it's so rudimentary that we have to stop and really double check what we believe. It's so easy to let that stuff influence us because we think that it's so simple we would never make a mistake in that area. And so we don't double check ourselves. So look at the things that make you angry or upset and really question, "What is the truth behind why I feel that way? Is it because you deserve better?" That's pride. When you feel like people are mistreating you or that you're not getting what you're owed, it's okay to feel upset, obviously, when we were created to live in a world where we are loved all the time completely. And it's okay to feel hurt when that doesn't happen. That's the normal outcome of living in this world. But just double check when you start to feel the friction of life and say, "Am I feeling this friction because I'm genuinely being mistreated or have I bought into something and God's truth is what's rubbing me the wrong way and I'm holding onto something that's not His truth." You can also flip that around and say, "What would it look like if I were living a perfect Christian life?" Imagine if you perfectly reflected Jesus, how would you spend your time and your money? How would you treat people and then say, "All right, where am I not lined up with that perfect image of Christ's likeness?" So those are ways that you can examine the truths that you currently believe and start to bring those in line with the truth of God. And once you focus on God's truth, you'll be living your life better. Number two, God's kingdom. In order to perfectly live out the Christian life as close to perfect as we humans can get, you need to focus on what is God's truth about you and about the world, but also you need to focus on God's kingdom. And there's a musical out, which I'm pretty sure we saw in one of our Friday night movies here, which is The Greatest Showman. And one of the lines from one of the songs, it talks about, "The world I close my eyes to see." And I think that that's a really beautiful way to think about the kingdom of God that we should be living for. Because the world we live in, the kingdom we live in, is fallen and sinful and corrupt. And if you focus on this world and how it operates, you are going to be robbed of your joy and of your energy. But there is a kingdom of God, which you do have to close your eyes to see. And there's really two kingdoms. There's the kingdom of here and now. There's the kingdom that God wants us to establish through our lives. And there's also the coming kingdom. The kingdom of here and now is what the Bible talks about when it says, "You are the light of the world." Or, "You are a city on a hill." There is a kingdom that is established by God changing our hearts and working through us and this world becoming more like the coming heavenly kingdom by how we live and how we change the world. And it's up to us to be that light. Jesus explains in that same parable in the Sermon on the Mount, he says, "You are the light of the world, but you can put yourself under a basket. You can hide yourself." He said, "Don't do that. Don't live like that. If you're really the city on the hill that you're supposed to be, you can't be hidden. You are visible to everyone and we need to live like that." And this kind of goes hand in hand with the truth thing we were talking about because the other thing I didn't do for this sermon was write out every single thing I was going to say. Yeah, the city on the hill, because we can't hide, but we must choose not to. This world will tell us that just be loyal to your family, be loyal to your friends, everyone else, nah, can they do something for you? Okay, well be nice to them. Otherwise don't waste your precious resources on people who can offer you nothing in return. And Jesus says, "Give specifically to the people who cannot give back to you. Throw parties for people who can't repay you." That's God's way. When we start to live that kingdom in the world, it wakes people up. It shakes people up. It'll make people unhappy and uncomfortable because they think that they're living good and when you're living up here, it makes them realize that they're not living as good as they thought they would. So it'll make some people unhappy, but it'll make God happy and that's what's really most important is making God happy. So examine what kind of kingdom are you creating by how you live your life and be very careful that you're not just living up to the world's definition of acceptable because the world's definition of acceptable does not meet God's definition. Jesus says, "Just pour your whole life out. Just give yourself away your money, your time, your talents. Give it away especially to the people who can't repay you, especially to the people who don't deserve it, to your enemies." These are the things that God says to pour your life into. And the world says, "That's just crazy." The world will say, "That's a waste. Why are you wasting your resources? Why are you wasting your money and your time on people like that or on worthless causes or on hopeless causes?" But that's how we bring God's kingdom into here and now. But as we're living and focusing on the kingdom of here and now, we can't forget the kingdom that is coming because as we do all this good work, we need to affix the label of Jesus onto everything we do. If you do all this good work and then people end up at the end of the day saying, "Well, you're a great person," then you're robbing Jesus of the glory he's due, first off. But secondly, you're robbing people of the opportunity to meet Jesus and to eventually enter into that heavenly kingdom. That heavenly kingdom is one that everyone will eventually stand at the gates to, but not everyone will get into. And so as we're living out the kingdom here on earth, don't forget to find some way to remind people that there is a coming kingdom and that there is only one door into that kingdom. Jesus says, "I am the way and no one comes to the Father except through me." It doesn't mean that everyone has to be an evangelist. It doesn't mean that everyone has to be out on the street corner with a placard on and says, "Ask me about Jesus." But it does mean that maybe you volunteer for a messy church. People learn about Jesus in a messy church. Or maybe you volunteer for Let's Talk or whatever else. Find a way to plug into the work that's being done where people are hearing about Jesus. Make sure that the Jesus label gets stuck onto every good work that you do. So that's the kingdom. Focus on God's truth in order to make sure that your life aligns with his truth. Focus on God's kingdom to make sure that your life is bringing the kingdom and bringing people into the kingdom. And then finally, focus on God's glory. So much of the Bible. Once you realize that the purpose of creation is to glorify God, then you start to realize just how much of the Bible talks about God's beauty and his glory and his power. In fact, wait, I've got a Bible verse. Romans 11, 36, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever." The whole point of creation is to glorify God. And we're fallen humans. And so when we think about people, if I were to set up some sort of system or society or something that was devoted to glorifying me, you would all rightly have a problem with that because I'm a fallen human and I don't deserve that much glory. But God is the ultimate. If somehow you had a measuring stick of things that were terrible and not good all the way up to the most perfectly wonderful good, you would know you've reached the end of the measuring stick because it would bump into God. Whatever numbers were being used to label that measuring stick, the very last number on that end would just say God. Because he is the standard of what is good, what is glorious, what is perfect. And so for him to be jealous for glory, the Bible says that he is jealous for glory. And it's absolutely right for him to be jealous for glory because there's nothing better. And he is perfect and he is flawless and it just all belongs to him. He created us and every bit of glory belongs to him. When you look at, he created and all of the good things of creation point to him. Like when you look at the majesty of mountains and the expanse of the starry night sky and when you sit there and you enjoy the peace and serenity and the beauty on a beach somewhere, these things glorify God. And I would argue that humans have not yet created something that stirs the human soul the way that the night sky or the beauty of a beach stir our soul. Or holding a newborn baby in our arms, that feeling of that precious little child in our arms. If somehow we ever had robots with artificial intelligence and they were to make babies, robot babies of their own, those robot parents would not feel about their robot babies the same way we do about our babies unless we programmed them to feel that way or unless they were just mimicking us because that feeling inside us is something placed there by God in order to draw our glory to him. And what sin is, is when we glorify these things instead of him. When we don't allow goodness to flow through these things up to him and when we instead, well as the Bible says, worship the creation rather than the creator. The greatest commandment is love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And that's just another way of saying everything that I've said here right now. Everything that comes out of your heart should be to God. Everything that comes out of your soul and your mind and your strength should be to God. Any joy that robs God of his glory is an idol. Any good thing that you enjoy without saying thank you God for this is idolatry. And that's why Jesus told that parable where he said, "Unless you come to me and hate father and mother, brother and sister, son and daughter, you cannot be my disciple." He wasn't saying you literally have to hate these people to be my disciple. He was saying that your love for him should trump all of those things and that when you feel the joy of family, it should be as a means of saying thank you God for this family. I've been working with Mark Tope. For Mark Tope, he was here maybe 20 years ago as an associate pastor and he really took hold of the youth group at that time and he's been teaching me Quaker history lessons as part of me. He's the head of Christian Ed for Western Early Meeting and so I kind of report to him in my new job. And so he's been taking me through some Quaker history lessons. And one of the things we've been talking about is how George Fox who kind of started the Quaker movement, he obviously, there were no Quakers when he was a kid. He grew up in a Puritan household and the Puritans were just fun and joy and that kind of stuff is wrong. And so you wake up, you read your Bible, you did your job, you read your Bible some more, you went to bed, went to church a couple days a week and that was it. And you certainly didn't joke around or say anything silly and it just kind of breaks my heart because God created good things and he created joy as a way for us to glorify him and I feel bad that those people back then were missing out on the opportunity to give God glory for the things that make us happy. Recently a gentleman, a pastor and author named John Piper has been, well not recently, for several decades now, he's been writing on a topic that he calls Christian hedonism and the word hedonism you think of like pagan Rome and all these terrible things but his point is that Christian hedonism is when you pursue joy as a means of glorifying God. Joy and pleasure are not the end in themselves and you certainly don't go after anything sinful, there is sinful hedonism and that's wrong but he is saying that you look for the goodness in life, you look for the good things that God has given you and you rejoice in those things to glorify God. His example that he came up with was he realized that by treasuring his wife above all other women he was showing her value, he was glorifying his wife by treasuring her above all other women and the conclusion that he came to from that was by treasuring God as our greatest pleasure, as our greatest joy we put him above everything else in this world. His sort of catchphrase for all this is God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. God will receive more glory from you when he is the thing that you love above everything else. And so the reason we didn't start with scripture today is because I'm going to close with scripture and this is something that he wrote, it's an article that he wrote, it's actually part of a sermon he gave but this is called "Reawaken Your Wonder for Jesus" and it's going to take me a minute to read, it's a little long but all of this is his scripture that he has compiled so nothing that I'm about to read is from anywhere outside of the Bible, this is all scripture and I want you just to sit and listen to it, I want you to marvel at the beauty and the wonder of Jesus and when I'm done reading we are just going to go straight into quiet time and just spend time just reflecting on God's beauty and God's glory and so my hope is as we leave here today that you will remain focused on the glory of God in his kingdom and his truth and that this love and this delight in him will go with you into your lives because this is the focus you need to have in order to successfully walk out and live out your Christian life. So like I said I'm going to read this now and I haven't completely timed it but it might take five or ten minutes so just sit and reflect and enjoy God during this time. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the Father full of grace and truth and Jesus said Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day, he saw it and was glad and they said to him you are not yet fifty years old and have you seen Abraham and Jesus said to them truly, truly I say to you before Abraham was born I am. Thomas said to Jesus Lord we do not know where you are going how can we know the way? Jesus said to him I am the way and the truth and the life no one comes to the Father except through me. Philip said Lord show us the Father. Jesus said to him have I been with you so long and still you do not know me Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. And Jesus cried out whoever sees me sees him who sent me. For Jesus is the image of the invisible God. In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. By him all things were created in heaven and on earth visible and invisible whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities all things were created through him and for him. He upholds the universe by the word of his power and in him all things hold together. And yet though he was in the form of God he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross. He committed no sin neither was deceit found in his mouth. And so it came to pass that by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. For God made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree. While we were still weak at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. And when that time approached he said no one takes my life from me but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again. So after making purifications for sins he sat down at the right hand of majesty on high. God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. God put all things in subjection to him. All angels and authorities and powers. He is now the head of the body, the church. The first born from the dead that in everything he might be preeminent. He has authority to forgive sins. He speaks and the wind and the sea obey him. He commands unclean spirits and they come out. He rebukes fevers and they depart. He causes the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk and lepers to be made clean. He commands the dead and they live. He suffers the little children to come to him but scatters the proud in the thoughts of their hearts and brings down the mighty in from their thrones. He does not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick until he brings justice to victory. And him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. No one ever spoke like this man. To know him is to know the unsearchable riches of Christ and he is coming again on the clouds even as they saw him go. But this time with the holy angels and with power and great glory and he will deliver us from the wrath to come. He will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. In that day he will dress himself for service and have us recline at table and he will come and serve us for he will still be meek and lowly in heart. And yet his eyes will be like a flame of fire, his feet like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace and his voice like the roar of many waters. And from his mouth will come a sharp two edged sword and we will see his face shining like the sun in its full strength. And so we will forever be with the Lord and we will no longer see through a glass darkly but face to face rejoicing in hope will give way to the joy of sight. The pleasures of every taste that bound us to Christ in this world will explode into the pleasures of heavenly feasting. And we will know finally, not in part, but perfectly that in his presence is fullness of joy and at his right hand are pleasures forevermore.