

Coffee with Phil - Episode 19 - Key Focus Areas Is The Key

Introduction.

Well, hi there and welcome to the podcast, my name is Phil Strong, welcome to coffee with Phil. And look, I wonder what coffee you're drinking today? I just had to have a little pick me up, so I had my usual piccolo latte double shot of espresso with some warm milk on the top and it was delicious. Fresh beans, freshly roasted by yours truly and well, wonder what coffee you're having today? Or perhaps you're going with a green leaf tea. It doesn't really matter, but we're having time together and I am delighted about that.

Today I want to speak to you about 'key focus areas is the key' and I wanna talk about planning, but I wanna talk about the catalyst for planning. I wanna talk about how you might set a direction for a fruitful life. And I want to start by talking about what it means to be off focus. I had a thought about this. If you're off focus just a little, then the long term result is significant.

You know there's an often used story about being 1 degree off your desired direction, and you might think about taking a course either on a boat or, well, today we're just going to say, what if you were walking a journey in a straight line and you walked for one kilometre, but you were off the mark by 1 degree. So the whole circle. Is 360 degrees, so if you were facing the wrong way, you'd be 180 degrees off the mark going in the wrong direction, but what if you were one degree just a small fraction off the focus by just a little. Well if you walked for one kilometre in the wrong direction by 1 degree, at the end of that kilometre, let's just say you did that for a day, that was your first day, you walked one kilometre, you're off the mark, your desired destination, you're off track by 17 metres, and you're like, well, that's not far I can see where I'm supposed to be. That is true, if you correct your error after one day, then you can get back on track.

But what if you didn't know you were off track and you kept walking in the wrong direction, 1 degree off the mark and you did that for a whole year, every day, you just focused on walking the path you knew, and you didn't realise it was the wrong direction, or you couldn't be bothered changing it. Then after a whole year you're going to be off the mark by 6 and ½ kilometres. After a whole year, one year, just one year of your life, living slightly off direction you're going to be 6 and a half kilometres off the mark, but do you know what's devastating about this, is that, if you're standing, trying to see where you're supposed to be. Well, your view is obscured by the horizon because the horizon of the earth is only 4.7 kilometres away from where you're standing, so you can't even see the place that you're supposed to be, and you've only been off track for one year.

Well, many people I know live out of focus and they go in the wrong direction. But what if you did that for 10 years? If you walked in the wrong direction, just one degree off for 10 years and you only walked one kilometre a day. You're going to be, after 10 years, you're going to be 64 kilometres off the mark, and I mean it's that's a long way to walk. It's a long way to drive. So what's my point? Even if you're off mark, by just a short, small amount you are going to end up in the wrong place? And So what I'd say to you today, this is coffee with Phil and we're in episode 19.

I want to say to you key focus here is the key, and I wanna share what I've been working on lately for my personal life and I hope that it helps you to create some focus. So key focus areas is the key.

What steals your focus?

Before I get there though, I wanna talk about what are the things that can steal our focus. Three things can steal our focus, friends and the first one is lack of clarity.

Lack of clarity will steal your focus, and quite simply, this is just having too many demands or the wrong priorities. You know the lack of focus is detrimental because sometimes we spend all our energy doing the wrong things, or we can't get focused because we've got too many things on our plate. I've just got too much to do, and so I'm gonna do everything in a really, really substandard way. So lack of clarity will steal your focus.

The second thing that will steal your focus is lack of control. Lack of control is when you've got too many masters. Too many people telling you what to do, the wrong people telling what to do, perhaps you're listening to the wrong advice, or you've got the wrong people in your life and you've given them power and influence to speak into your life.

But I would also say this to you by way of confession. One of the things that I've realised lately is the lack of control in my life is because I've had too many bad habits. I have been the master of my destruction because I haven't taken control of the things that are destructive in my life. So lack of control will steal your focus.

And finally the third one I want to share with you today. The third thing that will steal your focus is lack of conviction. Lack of conviction comes by you or me having too many excuses that will let us off the hook. You know, we pitch up low, we say it'll be OK, it's alright, I did my best, or it's not that important, or those people aren't really, I shouldn't be worried about them. Hang on. Come on. Lack of conviction will steal your focus.

So those three things will steal your focus, lack of clarity, lack of control and lack of conviction. So perhaps as one of your takeaways from this podcast is, you might wanna, after this, check the notes, they're in the description. Get those words and put them in front of you in a journal or on a whiteboard, or on one of your tablet device thingies, and ask yourself, do I have a lack of clarity? Are there too many demands in my life? Do I have a lack of control? Are there too many masters in my life, or the wrong ones? And do I have a lack of conviction, am I just full of excuses? Go on, I dare you to have a look at yourself.

Wrestling for my focus.

The second thing that I wanted to share with you today, for me personally is that if you've listened to a recent podcast I did around looking for refreshment, you'll notice that I've really been wrestling for my focus. Last year, 2022, there was an urgent, obvious need in my life for me to have a sabbatical, a time out to reset myself, and you know I worked with my board to make sure that that was well set up, as far

as, you know, me being absent for two or three months, I wanted to be accountable for them. Look, this was a precious, precious gift that was given to me, and I didn't wanna waste it, I took it really seriously. I took this to my prayer closet, I said, "Lord, what is on your heart? Come on, God, speak to me. What is on your heart that you wanna bring to me as part of this precious gift of time out?"

And you wouldn't believe it, oh, I'm sure you would, actually, but yeah. God spoke to me quite clearly. He said son, there are five key areas that I want you to focus on and I'll share those with you, at a high level anyway, but I want to share them with you because I think that they might be helpful for you. So let's have a look at these five areas now.

So the first thing God said to me is I wanna reframe how you interact with me in your personal world, I wanna reframe how you interact with me in your personal world, I was like "that's really good, let me write that down", and then the Lord said to me I want to re-envision your leadership aspirations, so what he wanted to do was put new life into the vision with regards to my leadership and the culture of the church we call ZION, so re-envision leadership aspirations, and I'm like "man that's another good one, let me write that down" the third one the Lord said to me, he says, I want to resurrect your passion for the lost and redirect how you create a pathway for people and I'm like, "Oh my goodness, this is gold. I'm having a great time here", so I wrote that down. Then the Lord said I want to reconnect you with the Supernatural way of living and the normal life of heaven. It's like ohh could that please become my everyday expectation and my everyday experience.

So reframe re-envision, resurrect, reconnect, and finally God said I want to reenergize your marriage with Kathy, so that your devotion to each other, and your connection with me is one of partnership, and I was like "Oh, that's good, that's really good, yeah we've been married 26 years, and I'm like, man, we need that", seriously, you know, it doesn't matter whether been married six months or six years or 60 years, bringing God into your marriage and having him re-energise it, is a really good idea.

So, I set about in my sabbatical to have time with the Lord to talk about these things, and so what I did as I spent time with him focusing on this, and the Sabbath was a real gift to me, seriously. The Sabbath was time out for me to be able to say, hey, look, there's something that God's got for me, and I want to get the most out of it. And I discovered this, you know. So, we checked out of our normal lives and we went away together and we had an itinerary, we had a plan, we had certain places in the world we wanted to be for certain things, and it was just a blessing.

But what I discovered is the Lord chooses to prepare us out of sight of others, and this is vital. Moses was prepared in the desert for 40 years. David was prepared to be king after his anointing, he was prepared to be king while he was in the cave. Jesus, the moment Jesus was baptised and the Holy Spirit came upon him, he went out into the wilderness, and there he was prepared for ministry, even further.

So, for me, you know like this time out, urgent, urgent, urgent Sabbatical needed. I was wrestling for focus, and the Lord said, look, these are the five areas that I wanna work on with you, and I was like, yeah, absolutely, pivotal, thank you, Lord, come on, help me.

Now it's time to walk these out.

And then I came, we came home end of 2022 and we had the New Zealand summer, and I thought this is great, and then the Lord said to me at the beginning of the year, son, it's time to walk these out, and so I had to go and put myself in the in the cave again, not literally, I didn't go up the mountains, and I didn't go overseas, but I put myself in the corner, in a chair by myself and I said, Lord, you're saying it's time to walk these out, it's time for me to have focus. What does that mean? And he took me back to these five key areas in my life.

And I was like, Lord, what what's going on? And he said, well, do you seriously think that you achieved all of these in your time out? In your sabbatical. And I said no, no I don't think I did. He's like, no, no, no, the time you had away with me and Sabbath was about your reset, and preparing you so that you had room for me to work in these areas of your life, so that, there's no way I could reframe your personal devotional life and give you new disciplines in the way you used to live. You needed to reset. He says there's no way I could re-envision you, and the view, and the vision that you have for the culture of ZION, he says the way you were, man, you were frazzled, fried, and frustrated, and quite frankly, you didn't have the ears to hear or the eyes to see what I have for you. And I was like, oh my goodness.

So, in that time the Lord help me to reset some key personal focus areas for the next season and I've, in my journal I've written here that for 2023, but I have a suspicion that the Lord's gonna work a long, slow, deep, rework in my life, and as fruit comes, there'll be layers and layers of the work that he's doing. So, I'm under no illusion this is a short term, project Phil Strong, is definitely a long term project.

So when the Lord said to me he wants to reframe my personal devotion life, I said to him this year and that at the beginning of 2023. So for me, I always do this at the beginning of a calendar year, so quite frankly, it doesn't really matter when you're listening to this podcast. You can complete this activity if you're looking for some focus in your life. You can follow exactly the story I've told you about how I've done things and you can achieve the same.

But I want to take a little bit of time to share some examples because I want to be accountable for this, but I also want there to be evidence of God's work in my life. I want his fingerprints all over my life. I want the evidence, tangible evidence of him doing the deep work. And so here it is, reframed personal devotional life, and what the Lord said to me is he said, I'd love for you to have regular personal retreats with me, with the aim of just connection with me. And I realised that over the last few years, with the pandemonium of the pandemic, I had forgotten to schedule these, which had been a pattern of mine, so maybe ten years ago I started blocking out two or three days, quarterly, and I'd take myself away, I'd pack some food and some supplies and a blank journal, or a big flipchart pad, and I'd head away somewhere, privately, with the goal, just to connect with God, to spend time one-on-one with him. Lord says, Ohh man, I'd love for you to do that again, and I was like, oh man, ohh, I'd love that also. So that's on my list under my focus area of reframe.

He's also asked me, invited me really into extended prayer sessions. I'm like, well, that doesn't sound like I'll be getting any work done if I'm doing retreats and prayer, and oh my goodness, I'm such a such an, such a silly person, you know, because the Lord is like, oh, well, mate, you know, if you're not connected with me, then what you're doing isn't worth it anyway. And I said Ohh, good word, that's a good word. The Lord said to me, I want you to bring worship as a leadership function, and look at David for an example.

Now before you get panicked and start calling the elders, I am not planning to dance around in an ephod, but I think we've gotta have a public lifestyle of worship, it's gotta be a priority. Worship for me is not just about music, but it includes music. Worship is about a posture, and I'll, I'll be honest with you, my personal journal being published in the podcast, is what I'm doing right here. I'm actually inviting people to be part of my journey, because I think that the pain that I've been through, and the process I'm going through is not supposed to be private. It's supposed to be, hopefully some guides and some inspiration for others, so, have a think about how you might apply that.

When the Lord said to me, I want to re-envision your view of the vision, the culture of ZION, the key thing here, I'm looking at a list. But really, he's asking me to gather people together, to push deeper into the concept of oneness. I wrote about this in a recent elders report, and in the book of Ephesians, Paul writes to the church, and I can count at least 23 references to the church living in Oneness. Oneness is a concept that Paul writes about, about a togetherness in our life, living for each other with a mode of love. And ah man, I might dig into that in a podcast, because I think, it doesn't matter where you are, you were designed for community. If you're alone, you're in trouble, and oneness is God's answer for that. So mental note to myself, I think I'll put that on my list and we'll dig into those scriptures and see what the Bible might tell us.

The only other one I think it's worth talking about here on this one for the sake of time is, further explore Kingdom culture. When we pray, our mission in life is, thy Kingdom come Lord thy will be done here on Earth as it is in heaven. I don't think we talk about that enough. I think we talk about the world as it is, we complain about the world it is. We're fearful about what's happening in the world as it is, but we're not realising that the answer is our mission to bring heaven to Earth, and so God's really trying to breathe life into that in my world and reset my framework.

The third area that the Lord invited me into was to resurrect my passion for the lost, and one of the key things here is, he says, I want you to have a personal connection with an evangelist. An Evangelist is a gift that Jesus gave the church for the purpose of inspiring others to be a living presentation of the gospel, and an invitation to others to live that way also, and so I've reached out to someone that I have on my social channels, and I've said hey man, let's just hang out, let's have coffee. I don't know what God wants to do, but let's use the principle of osmosis. Which is really, I'm gonna, I want to be infused with your life. May your goodness and your grace rub off on me.

And also I think really I'm asking the second part of this, there's actually 6 on my list, but the second part I want to share with you today is, asking Jesus to open my eyes every day. Who does he want me to see around me? You know, I'm reading the gospels this week or no, I'm not, I'm reading the Gospel of Luke this week, a small part of the beginning of it, let's just be honest, but I just noticed that Jesus is looking around him, he's walking into the village, he sees a funeral, he raises the man from the dead, he walks along, and the centurions servant is unwell, and he says oh, okay, let's go, let's go, I wanna go there. He's moved to serve those that he sees. And I know that I've been really guilty in my life, always, of being centered on me, and my ambitions, and my busyness, and quite frankly I've probably missed a whole bunch of that around me.

The 4th area, and actually the last one that I'll share with you today just for the sake of time is, reconnect with supernatural and I've gotta be honest here, I feel a real stirring in this. But I suspect that this is not for this year. The elders and I have been seeking God's heart and his priorities, and this is high on his list, but it's not on the short time frame. So, if I could say it's important but not urgent and we're

really feeling God calling us back to a place of refreshness and connection with him, and so this one might be on the back burner, but there's a preparation happening in me. So, watch out for that, I'm excited to share it with you.

I've avoided talking about the re-energising the relationship part, but I would just wanted to. I want to highlight that it's definitely a focus. Kathy and I are having a real challenging season together, which means we're closely connected, we're protecting our connection and we're talking and praying through things together, and that's been really invigorating for me, not doing it alone, doing it with someone else, and sharing the journey. So, thanks to those that are around us and supporting us in that, thanks to those of you that pray for us regularly, and please don't stop.

What about you?

But look, I just wanted to finish with that, because I really feel like, that the key thing to finish with is for you to think about you. I want you to think about that question around lack of clarity, lack of control and lack of conviction. I want to finish with this, I want to give you a challenge and then I want to finish with a Psalm.

I want you to think about your, the impact your lack of clarity, your lack of control, and your lack of conviction. I want to think about the impact that has on those around you. It has a negative impact. Are you aware that your lack of clarity, lack of control or lack of conviction is having a negative impact on the people around you? And most importantly, those that love you. So do something about it, fix it, take time out, be like King David.

I want to finish with some verses from Psalm 62. So, let's open the Scriptures and I want to finish with the writings of Psalm 62, which are attributed to David, and you know, so grab your device of choice, jump to Psalm 62. I'm going to read from the new King James version, and truly David says truly my soul silently waits for God. From him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation. Well, come on like if we just stopped there, that would be enough. But listen, I'm going to jump down to verse 5. David says this my soul, he commands his soul, my soul wait silently for God alone. For my expectation is from him. He only, he alone is my rock and my salvation. He is my defense, I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory, the rock of my strength. My refuge is in God. Trust in him at all times you people. Pour out your heart before him. God is a refuge for us.

May you truly be inspired by that Psalm and may it spur you to come back to a place of pouring your heart out before him to find leadership in your life that leads you to the key focus for your life that you would live a refreshed life, and a fulfilling life, and a life of joy in partnership with Jesus.

Hey, I hope you've enjoyed today's podcast. I hope that my journey helps you to live a life of purpose on purpose. I look forward to sharing more with you soon as we carry on the journey together, God bless you. See you soon.