

A WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

WORDS FROM BIGTOP

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from Curt “BigTop” Marek

FOCUSED IN THE CHAOS

Where to Look When Everything Is Loud

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee.”

ISAIAH 26:3 (ASV)

It’s been a few weeks since I’ve written, and I want to be honest about why. School started, and anyone who works in a school or has kids knows what that means — every day is a hundred fires and a thousand details.

On top of that, I’ve been in the middle of a job search that has been harder and slower than I expected. And let me tell you, finding a job in your 50s is not like finding a job in your 20s. Back then, you could send out a résumé on Monday and have an interview by Friday. Now you’ve got nearly thirty years of experience and a track record you’re proud of — and somehow that can make the door harder to open, not easier. You start to wonder if the world has already decided your best years are behind you. I don’t believe that for a second, and I don’t think God does either.

At the same time, I’m building Soulutions Church at solutionschurch.org — an online church with one simple mission: share the gospel, and help non-traditional believers find a local church in their own area. Not everyone is going to walk through the doors of a traditional church first. Some people need to meet Jesus on their phone before they’re ready to meet a congregation. We’re laying out our ten Core Beliefs and producing a series of short videos to go with them. And my new book, *The Mentoring Initiative: Not a Mission Impossible*, is just over a month away from hitting the shelves on November 3rd, 2026. These are dreams God put in my heart, and I’m excited about every one of them.

And then there’s my family. My mom is 78. She’s been in a wheelchair for more than ten years and is bedridden most of the time. My dad, who’s 83, has been her caregiver through all of it. They’ve been together 56 years, and watching Dad care for Mom, day in and day out, models

everything I aspire to be. That's what love looks like when the cameras are off and the vows get tested. Five years ago, when Dad broke his hip and spent seven weeks in rehab, I moved in with them. I set my own life aside to help take care of them both. Just in the past five months, I finally moved out, and I'm about an hour and a half away now. Honestly, I feel conflicted about it. At 54, I'm finally moving on with my life. I've been divorced for just over eleven years, and most of that time I was busy raising the last five of my seven kids. Now I've finally found someone to build a life with in my significant other, and I'm so grateful for that. But I also carry a strong sense of responsibility to provide for my parents, and that doesn't switch off just because you moved out. I'm still learning how to hold both — the new life God is giving me, and the weight of the one I stepped out of. And then Dad had another heart attack scare. When you get that call, and you're ninety minutes down the road, everything else stops.

So my mind hasn't been in the game. I haven't been writing, and some days I haven't been doing much of anything well. I'm not writing this from the other side of it. I'm writing from right in the middle.

That's the question I've been sitting with: how does someone stay focused in the midst of chaos and confusion? Scripture doesn't pretend the chaos isn't real. But it does show us three kinds of chaos — and three ways back to focus.

The Grind: Martha in the Kitchen

Luke 10 tells us Jesus came to the home of Martha and Mary. Mary sat at His feet and listened. But “Martha was cumbered about much serving” (Luke 10:40). Cumbered — weighed down, pulled apart, distracted. Nothing Martha was doing was bad. Somebody had to cook. Somebody had to set the table. But the everyday tasks crowded out the very Person she was doing them for. Finally she snapped: “Lord, dost thou not care that my sister did leave me to serve alone?”

I know Martha. I've been Martha these last few weeks. The start of a school year doesn't care about your devotional life. There's always one more thing to fix, one more call to return, one more problem that can't wait. And it doesn't stop when I get home. There's the lawn to mow, a door that squeaks, breakfast and dinner for my significant other's kids, working out at the gym (I'm down 65 pounds in the past four months!), the house to clean — and on and on. Some days I honestly wonder where I'll find the time to work once I do land a job, because there's so much to be done around the house every single day. And every one of those things is legitimate. That's what makes the grind so dangerous — it's full of good things.

Jesus answered her gently:

“Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: for Mary hath chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

LUKE 10:41–42

He said her name twice. That’s not a rebuke — that’s a friend trying to get your attention. The grind will always have one more thing. Focus starts by deciding what the one thing is, and sitting there first. That means figuring out what’s truly important and what can wait. Too many times we chase after the things that can wait — or the things that have no eternal place in our lives at all — while the one thing that matters most keeps getting pushed to later. The work will still be there. He might not wait in your living room forever.

The Prison: Joseph and the Forgotten Years

A few weeks back, in *Wells in the Wilderness*, I wrote about Joseph’s pit and his two forgotten years, and how hope gets dug out in places like that. This time I want to look at the same prison from a different angle: how Joseph stayed focused while he was stuck in it.

He had a dream from God, and then every step seemed to take him further from it — sold by his brothers, falsely accused, thrown in a cell. Maybe that’s where you are. Every task, every obligation, every “not yet” seems to move you farther from your goals, your dreams, your aspirations.

That’s what this job search has felt like. You send out another application. You wait. You get a “no,” or worse, you get nothing at all. And when you’re refreshing your inbox waiting on a call back, even the dreams you’re actively building — a church, a book — can feel like they’re on the other side of the prison wall.

And if I’m really honest, some days I can’t tell which is which. Is the job search what’s keeping me from focusing on the dream — building Soulutions Church, writing this devotional every week, the book series on mentoring? Or are those dreams the distraction from the job hunt? I don’t have a clean answer to that yet. Maybe that’s exactly why I need to learn from Joseph.

Here’s something I’ve come to believe: a job itself can become a prison — one that keeps you from the dream God has for you and your family. As a father, how much can you really lead your family if the job of paying the bills becomes such a burden that you never get to spend time with your kids?

I learned that the hard way back in 2008. We had just adopted the three amigos — ages 4, 6, and 10 — our baby was 2, and my California girl was 8. Then we lost everything: our home, our cars, my job. For three months we lived in the church in Spicewood, sleeping on blow-up beds. There

was no running water. We had water brought in every week to fill a 500-gallon tank, just so we could flush the toilets in the two restrooms and wash our faces. We cooked on a hot plate and drove into town twice a week to our parents' homes so the kids could shower.

Most people would call that a prison. But it was the most free and liberating time we ever had as a family. We got to learn each other. We played together and built together. That's where I learned to braid the girls' hair and talk to them on a dad level. We played at the springs and just let God bless us. We never went hungry. The bills just got paid. And a bond that has lasted a lifetime started sprouting in that old church house!

Sometimes what looks like a prison is actually the place God sets you free. And sometimes what looks like freedom — a steady paycheck — can turn out to be the real cell.

But look at what Scripture says in the middle of Joseph's worst season:

"But Jehovah was with Joseph, and showed kindness unto him, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison."

GENESIS 39:21

Not after the prison. In it. And Joseph didn't sit and wait for his dream to show up. He did excellent work right where he was, and "that which he did, Jehovah made it to prosper" (Genesis 39:23). He even kept caring for the people around him — he noticed two fellow prisoners looked troubled and asked, "Wherefore look ye so sad to-day?" (Genesis 40:7).

Even then, the chief butler forgot him for two full years (Genesis 40:23, 41:1). The Psalmist says of Joseph, "Until the time that his word came to pass, the word of Jehovah tried him" (Psalm 105:19). The prison wasn't taking him away from the dream. It was preparing him to carry it. Focus in the prison season means being faithful with today's task, and trusting that God hasn't lost track of tomorrow's promise.

The Storm: Jesus Asleep in the Boat

The third kind of chaos is the storm — the kind that makes you feel completely alone. In Mark 4, the disciples are crossing the sea when "there ariseth a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the boat, insomuch that the boat was now filling" (Mark 4:37). And where is Jesus? "In the stern, asleep on the cushion." So they wake Him with almost the same words Martha used: "Teacher, carest thou not that we perish?" (Mark 4:38).

When I heard about my dad, that was the storm. There's a particular kind of helpless you feel when it's your father, you're an hour and a half away, and there's nothing you can fix. In

moments like that, God can seem silent — even asleep. But here’s what the disciples missed: He was in the boat the whole time. He never left. Before they ever pushed off from shore, He had already said, “Let us go over unto the other side” (Mark 4:35). The storm didn’t cancel His word.

“And he awoke, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.”

MARK 4:39

Jesus wasn’t asleep because He didn’t care. He was asleep because He knew exactly how the trip was going to end. The loneliness you feel in the storm is real, but it isn’t the truth. The truth is that He is right in front of you — close enough to wake up.

And here’s what so many of us forget: we already know the end game too. The book of Revelation was written a long time ago, and it tells us exactly how this ends — “The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15). We win. But if I’m honest, is that really what we’re worried about? Most of us aren’t kingdom-minded. We’re focused on the boat ride — on the particular storm our particular boat is in — and not on the fact that God wins in the end.

Everything we toil with is part of His bigger plan. Nobody stays on the mountaintop for long, so enjoy the ride. The journey itself is the opportunity — to bless another person along the way, and to bring more to His glory, not ours. Life is so much more than the random storms we find ourselves in.

The Same Question, Three Times

Notice the thread that runs through all three stories. Martha asked, “Dost thou not care?” The disciples asked, “Carest thou not?” And Joseph had two long years in a cell to ask the same thing. Every time, the answer was yes. He cared in the kitchen. He cared in the prison. He cared in the boat.

I don’t have this all figured out. I’m not perfect, and I’m not writing to you as someone who has mastered focus. I’m working through life one day at a time, just like you. But here’s what I’m holding onto, and what I’d invite you to hold onto with me. Choose the one thing, and sit at His feet before you do anything else. Be faithful with the task in front of you today, because the Lord is with you in it. And when the storm is loudest, remember who’s in the boat and what He already promised about the other side. Focus isn’t the absence of chaos. It’s knowing where to look when the chaos comes.

A PRAYER FOR FOCUS IN THE CHAOS

Lord, You see everything that's pulling at us right now — the schedules, the responsibilities, the phone calls we didn't see coming. For the ones of us who've been Martha lately, cumbered about much serving, call our name twice until we hear You, and show us the one thing that is needful. For the ones in a prison season, sending out one more application and waiting on a call back that doesn't come, remind us that You are with us in the cell, not just after it. Make whatever we do prosper, and keep our eyes open to the hurting people right next to us. For the ones in the storm — sitting beside a hospital bed, or an hour and a half down the road wishing we could be there — wake us up to the truth that You never left the boat. Thank You for parents who model faithful love when no one is watching. Help us hold the new seasons You're giving us and the responsibilities we still carry without letting either one crowd You out. Keep us in perfect peace as our minds stay on You. Amen.

Sit With It

1. What are the “many things” crowding out the one thing in your life right now? What would it look like to sit at His feet first tomorrow morning, before anything else gets your attention?
2. Where does life feel like a prison — where every task seems to move you farther from the dream? What is the faithful task right in front of you today?
3. Joseph noticed the sad faces of the men in the cell with him, even while he was waiting on his own breakthrough. Who around you is hurting that you might be missing while you wait on yours?
4. When have you felt like God was asleep in your storm? Looking back now, where was He in the boat with you?
5. What has God already spoken over your “other side” that the storm is trying to make you forget?
6. Who in your life models faithful love the way my dad has for my mom? Have you told them what their example means to you?
7. Are you holding two things in tension right now — a new season and an old responsibility? What would it look like to bring both to God instead of feeling like you have to choose?

— **BigTop**

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