

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.

If you've never done this before, I highly recommend that you go downtown to the Cleveland Museum of Art and find the part of the collection having to do with Christianity. You'll know you're in the right place when you see a large icon of Jesus on the cross looking back at you. For thousands of years, artists have attempted to capture this Jesus in painting and sculpture so that we might "see" the object of our faith, and be led to ponder his passion; his love for us; his endurance of the cross on our behalf; his compassion; his resurrected and ascended victory. You should go see it and if you're really interested, I know people who can help you out.

The writer of Hebrews instructs us to fix our eyes on Jesus and to "throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles." How blessed we would be if we would do that. But you know how it usually goes. There is so much fun to be had. So many stunning sights competing for our attention. So many causes to take up. So many appetites to satisfy. So many itches to scratch. So many games to watch or play. And so our eyes have a hard time fixing on anything. The devil loves to keep us distracted, and he will do whatever it takes, as long as you are not focusing on the Son of God. He even will try to sell you the lie that "You don't want to be thinking about Jesus all the time. You don't want to turn into one of those religious extremists. Being cool is more important than being faithful. By all means, keep religion in your back pocket in case you need God to give you something, but you'd better keep it close to the vest and under the radar and basically unnoticeable."

What a temptation. It can sound reasonable, and certainly would make our lives easier, and it sure will cause less friction in my relationships, so our focus shifts, we go in those directions, and then when something bad happens wonder why God feels so far away. We need to repent of how easily our attention is drawn away from our Savior. We need to repent of the times when we have lived as if God was optional.

I've always been amazed by figure skaters who can go into one of those really tight spins and then stop on a dime. I've read that the way they regulate their equilibrium is to pick one spot in the arena and to try to look at that spot for as long as they can before turning their head again. The figure skater fixes her eyes on one spot, and that keeps her from hitting the ice.

The things that hinder and the sin that entangles can make us feel like our lives are spinning out of control. But when we humbly and honestly repent, we are then directed to fix our eyes on that one spot; the only spot that can help us; the Holy Spirit guides us to lay eyes on the cross of Jesus Christ our Lord, and to see in his bloody death our sins taken away from us forever. In the

crucified Christ we see our death sentence commuted. He slips on the prisoner's chains, and we gain complete freedom.

Fix your eyes on Jesus! For not only did he die on your behalf, but He was raised to life on your behalf! Because he lives, you too will live a life that has no end. Again, Satan will still try to get you to look at other things; at disease; at murder; at terrorism; at natural disasters and accidents at man's cruelty to his fellow man. He wants you to fixate on these things to the point of fear or panic or hopelessness. But with the risen Christ in our sights, there is no room for fear. Peace replaces panic. Hopelessness is pushed aside in favor of certainty. He is the resurrection and the life; whoever lives and believes in Him will never die. Life in this world will reach an endpoint, but a continued existence with God will go on forever. We are reassured and comforted by a living Savior and Friend when we look to Him.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus. When we do, we see what true love is all about. Our passage tells us that Jesus endured the cross "for the joy set before him." What was that joy? The joy of rescuing you for eternity. The joy of holding one of his children in his arms. Anticipating the joy of closeness with you, He endured the agony of crucifixion, because that's the price he had to pay. You were worth it to Him. From Jesus we learn that true love is a decision to look to the needs of others before your own; that true love often expresses itself in self-sacrifice; in other words, true love just gives.

Now, remember, Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before him; the joy of welcoming you to heaven. And so the giving of our offerings, the giving of our time and attention should also be done with joy on our part. When giving to the Lord is done grudgingly or out of guilt, it probably shouldn't be done at all. Simply put, what you offer God should be an expression of how thankful you are for all that he has done and continues to do for you. It is an act of worship. The dollar amount is not the point. The point is, does my giving reflect the joy with which Jesus gave Himself to me?

Fix your eyes on Jesus. He is not only the origin of great art, but the origin of a great life. It's a life lived knowing that Jesus rejoices over you.